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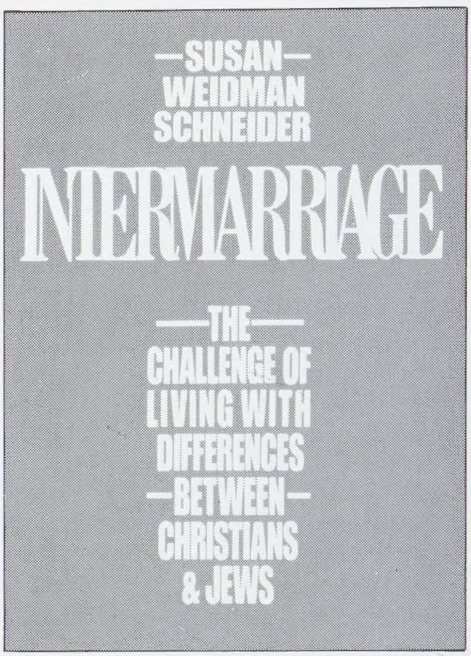

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LILITH

SPRING 1990/5750 VOL. 15, NO. 2

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LILITH is named for the legendary predecessor of Eve who insisted on equality with Adam: *"After the Holy One created the first human being, Adam, He created a woman, also from the earth, and called her 'Lilith.' Lilith said, "We are equal because we both come from the earth."* (from *The Alphabet of Ben Sira, 23a-b*)

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It's the classic opening – there's good news and there's bad news. First, the bad, because it provides a lot of stimulus for how we can learn from the good.

The bad news is that women in Israel and all across the world who have been petitioning merely for the right to worship as Jews at the Western Wall and elsewhere have been treated with utter disdain by Israel's civil and religious authorities. (See Kol Ishah, p. 26) And while the support for "The Women of the Wall" has mounted, we have also heard disheartening stories that even women in "progressive" Orthodox circles in the United States have criticized the activists for speaking out too loudly (whatever that is) on women's rights to equal rights. That women's voices are still being silenced tells us more than ever before that the title of LILITH's news pages – "Kol Ishah," the voice of women – is the appropriate choice.

What it's all about is power, surrounded on the one side by powerlessness and on the other by empowerment. And what we've got to figure out in the 90's is how to avoid the former and help ourselves to some of the latter.

Women everywhere awaited the response of Israel's Ministry of Religious Affairs to a simple and clear-cut proposition: that Jewish women really are people, entitled as all others to worship freely. The simple exercise of women's power as people, the power to define themselves as Jews, was denied in a twisted piece of reasoning that claims (as you'll read) that women cannot pray at the Western Wall in Jerusalem – nor anywhere else, for that matter – that might offend unnamed worshippers and violate unspecified "customs of the place." Never mind that the women worshippers themselves are mightily offended. The rights of women are once again being relegated to the status of an ancillary issue. Chutzpah!

And yet there's good news as well. The Women's Legal Center in Jerusalem, part of the Israel Women's Network, received an innovative grant from the Jewish Agency (World Jewry's Israel arm), and then promptly turned around and with the funds *sued* the Jewish Agency for discrimination against women in retirement policies! We're learning how to use the system – on both sides of the Atlantic – to better the status of Jewish women (and hence, please recall, the status of all Jews; women are, after all, a sub-set of the Jewish people and not a bunch of enemy aliens).

Other good news, also on the legal front. The president of B'nai B'rith Women, in a response to the attempted ouster of their organization from B'nai B'rith International, issued a press release using language that sizzled on the page – a far cry from the careful diplomatic phrases that clog the mails from Jewish organizations every day. Sharp words and real truths, in a statement redolent with the sweet smell of power well used. Whatever the outcome of the legal machinations at BBI, the way BBW has responded sends a clear message that Jewish women's groups are no longer "auxiliaries."

No more nice Jewish girls!

Susan

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LETTERS

SCHOLARSHIP ABOUNDS

"Jewish Feminist Scholarship" (Winter 1990) by Vanessa Ochs was very welcome indeed.

LILITH's readers should know that even though the impression is given that scant materials existed "even ten years ago," Biblio Press' *Jewish Women Studies Guide* by Elwell and Levenson (first edition, 1983) contained curriculum guides by some of the scholars mentioned in LILITH's article; the second edition of 1987, co-published by the University Press of America, is now widely used.

Also, the first edition of Aviva Cantor's *Jewish Woman Bibiliography, 1900-1980,* which was published in 1979, has a variety of dissertation papers and conference proceedings as well as historical references.

Doris Gold
New York City

VOLUNTEERING IN ISRAEL

After years of missions, speeches, countless checks, exhortations, letters and visits with dear friends and colleagues, it was Volunteers for Israel (mentioned in "Tsena Rena," Summer 1989) that made me a "real" kind of partner with my Israeli counterparts.

Known by it's acronym, SAR-EL, the Volunteers for Israel was founded by a former paratrooper, General Aharon Davidi, right after the invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Each year since then, approximately 3,000 persons aged 18 to 80 have come from all over North America, England and France to volunteer.

As a *mitnadevet* (volunteer), one travels to Israel cheaply and is sent to an army base or city where one is housed and fed during a three-week work assignment. Volunteers replace reservists who would otherwise have to take time from their normal family and work lives. The jobs vary according to placement and needs: one may assist in repacking parachutes, cleaning tank parts, or sorting optical equipment. Volunteers are offered home hospitality over Shabbat with Israeli families. SAR-EL takes the group on weekly sight-seeing excursions. There are optional Hebrew lessons, lots of singing, informal lectures, *shmoozing* and good fun.

An American woman volunteer receives more respect from Israelis in all walks of life for three weeks volunteer service to the country than any other kind of participation, short of making *aliyah!*

Raquel Newman
San Francisco CA

CREATING RESPECT FOR BIRTHING WOMEN

In her article, "Instructions for the Birthing Team" (Winter 1990), Shirley Stanger pleads for greater respect and empathy towards "couples with different lifestyles."

To expect modern hospital personnel to go along with and endorse such completely illogical and essentially rejecting gestures towards women in labor as the practice of *niddah* — so that a woman cannot be touched by her husband "during any type of uterine bleeding" — falls under the heading of unrealistic expections, to say the least.

If the ultra-Orthodox are put off by the hospital personnel's understandable coolness towards these irrational concepts, they should be delivered at home by an Orthodox midwife who will comply with these considerations.

Gretel Bleich Rubin
Rye NY

THANKS TO LILITH

I enjoyed LILITH Fall 1989 and Winter 1990 more than I could have imagined I would. My own relationship to my Jewish heritage has been cautious. But the diversity, honesty, ingenuity and passion of the work collected in these two issues impressed and moved me. Even your advertising is provocative and suggests to me, as a new reader, a world of Jewish feminism I am deeply gratified to know of.

Joy A. Tomchin
New York City

Having just read LILITH for the first time yesterday, I felt validated. I walked out on Judaism at age 15. I wanted to be a rabbi, and I was told that was impossible. I wanted to sing in the shul choir, and I was told that a young girl should be going out on dates on Friday nights.

Although I consider myself a citizen of the universe, an acknowledger of all true paths and sages, still I know I am Jewish, if only by inflection. The childhood memories and values have served me well. I am happy to see that some of my sisters stayed to live the dreams I dreamed.

I am certain that my growing philosophic life has caused me to get in touch with the human and finite and the eternal and infinite from my past. I light *yahrzeit* candles for my parents. This year I will light Chanukah candles to honor the struggle within to keep the flame of love of God burning.

Karen Timmons
Forestville CA

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KOL ISHAH

Kol Ishah — "Woman's Voice." Traditionally, the voice of the Jewish woman was not to be heard in public, lest it arouse men. No more. These pages are for news about Jewish women, usually in their own strong voices.

ISRAEL'S BROADCASTING AUTHORITY SILENCES WOMEN'S VOICES

The Israeli Broadcasting Authority, which regulates both television and radio broadcasts, banned two new songs by Israeli pop singers Chava Alberstein and Nurit Galron because of the songs' peace-oriented lyrics. In making their decision early in December, the four members of the authority's governing board declared that the songs "damage the morale" of the Israeli people and are "pro-PLO songs."

However, following a public outcry over the curtailment of freedom of speech, Yosef Harish, Israel's attorney general, rescinded the ban later in the month.

Alberstein's song, "Chad Gadya," is a parody of the traditional Passover song of the same name. It likens an earlier Israel to the innocent pet goat — kid — of the "Chad Gadya" tune. But now, she sings: "I have become a leopard and a preying wolf . . . .How long will this cycle of fear continue?"

In Galron's song, "After Us the Flood," she alludes to the March 1988 incident in which a soldier shot a young Arab girl in the eye, causing her to lose it. She chastises Israelis who don't want to hear about problems in the occupied territories. "No don't tell me about a girl who lost her childhood/ It just makes me feel bad . . . .Let's hit the bustling streets of Tel Aviv," she sings.

Galron has said that it is a mistake to call her song political. "I just tried to paint a picture of a very hedonistic Tel Aviv society that simply doesn't want to know what really happens outside the city limits. It's a song about Tel Aviv more than the *intifada*," she says. "After Us the Flood" is included on an album which represents Galron's first attempt at writing her own lyrics.

Alberstein also wrote the words to the traditional melody.

— PG

WOMEN AND POWER, B'NAI B'RITH STYLE

In a process that has been described as "the equivalent of a hostile takeover," B'nai B'rith International (BBI) is trying to expel the B'nai B'rith Women (BBW) from its "family" of organizations. This follows BBI's decision in 1988 to admit women to its previously all-male chapters.

Hyla Lipsky, president of 120,000-member BBW, claims that "B'nai B'rith International's decision-makers now seek total control over their empire. They will brook no independence."

The women's organization, autonomous by constitutional decree since 1962, has been engaged in a struggle with B'nai B'rith International for about eighteen months — a struggle, essentially, over who will attract and then speak for those Jewish women who want to affiliate with B'nai B'rith. In a period when, according to BBW Executive Director Elaine Binder, B'nai B'rith itself is "suffering from membership decline and financial restraints," the umbrella organization sees BBW members as a "captive potential population," whose numbers and membership dollars could be added to the BBI ranks.

In September 1988, the "men's biennial," concerned over declining enrollment, decided that B'nai B'rith International should admit women (see LILITH's report, Spring 1989). Following the BBI decision, BBW passed a resolution of its own reaffirming the organization's status as a separate legal entity, thus pitting the two groups against each other.

"There have been no negotiations, but there has been warfare in local communities," says Binder. "They got our mailing list — although it was never released to them officially — and sent mail to every member of B'nai B'rith Women soliciting them to stay a part of B'nai B'rith by joining B'nai B'rith International. They even discounted their membership price — something they've never done before."

In December 1989, apparently in reaction to BBW's refusal to rescind its assertion of autonomy, the BBI Board of Governors decided to begin proceedings to terminate the relationship between the two groups. It has even threatened to take legal action against BBW and individual members of its executive board, according to Lipsky.

"We also have a right to exist as an organization," declares Binder, emphasizing that the decision of BBW to "reaffirm" the organization's historical automony means the continuation of a strong women's voice speaking out on "women's and family issues — keeping them in the forefront. BBW has a mission that can't be achieved without a separate identity."

The question of whether these issues are better mainstreamed into the concerns of general Jewish organizations cuts, of course, right to the heart of the matter: will these general organizations, still largely led by men even after two decades of Jewish feminist activism, ever take these issues as seriously as women must?

— SWS

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20 YEARS LATER, YOUNGER WOMEN STILL DEBATE "FEMINISMS"

At what was billed as "the first national conference for and by feminists in their 20's," Jewish women made sure that their voices were heard.

The conference, held in Washington, D.C. in November, was organized by the Washington-based Center for Women Policy Studies and attracted about 300 women. For most of the young women in attendance, it was a time to define what it meant to be a feminist and to discuss why so many women of their generation feel uncomfortable with that title.

"I think a lot of people are confused about what the feminist movement is and what it means to them," said Caroline Corum, a graduate student at George Mason University in Arlington, Va. "The movement should go back to some traditional marketing principles."

But it became clear, as woman after woman addressed her peers before an open microphone, that there was not just one feminism being talked about. There were different visions and agendas.

For many at the conference, especially black women, the primary issue was racism, both within the feminist movement and in society at large. Others stood up to say that feminists of their generation should fight homophobia, ageism, discrimination based upon handicap, and economic inequality. Meanwhile, countering the fact that Jewish concerns were not addressed explicitly, a small group drafted a statement that was read at the closing session.

"In the feminist community, we often feel unrecognized," said Laura Shaw, a senior at Columbia University in New York City. "Anti-Semitism is a real problem, and as feminists we should include it among the oppressions we are fighting. Not talking about anti-Semitism and not having Jewish women on the panel to talk about Jewish-feminist issues are two ways of making us invisible." At that point about a dozen women, one by one, stood up and identified themselves as both Jews and feminists.

This "tapestry" approach to feminism — by both Jewish and non-Jewish women — came at a price. After nearly three days of meetings, the women could not agree on a common set of goals. Instead, they agreed to an alternative: a new national organization that would allow young women of differing racial, sexual-orientation, ethnic, class and ability backgrounds to discuss their differences and to find common ground.

"I think I envisioned more concrete goals coming out of this," said Susan Wolfson, a young political consultant from Boston and a member of the conference's steering committee. "We're still struggling with the baggage of our precursors."

— Ellen Flax

4,000 Arab and Jewish women march together through Jerusalem in December during Peace Now's "1990 — Time for Peace."

Continued on page 26

"Speaks to all Jewish women struggling with a commitment to justice and a passion for Judaism."*

"Judith Plaskow expertly brings together a wide range of diverse sources concerning feminism and Judaism... Thought-provoking . . . sheds new light on a central problem facing the Jewish community."
—*Susannah Heschel, Department of Religious Studies, Southern Methodist University
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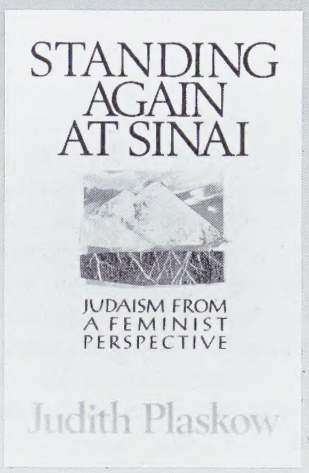

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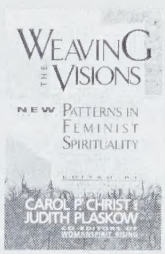

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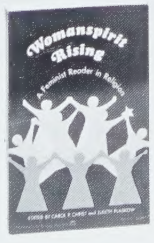

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Why Women are Writing Holocaust Memoirs Now

by Ellen Fishman

In the afterword to her book, *Cabbages and Geraniums,* Valerie Jakober Furth says:

> For me remembering the Holocaust is only recent. About eight years ago I passed through a personal crisis. As one does during such periods, I examined my life closely. Up to then I thought that I had succeeded quite well in living in the present. As I looked more closely, however, I realized that in many ways, like roots speading thickly underground, my experiences of that time had affected my life profoundly. They had, in effect, shaped me into the woman I am today.

Women often write their memoirs from a perspective different from the more traditional male developmental model, in which separation and individuation — not relationship — are the goals. The female model realizes that far from hindering or detracting from maturity, connectedness enhances it. Janet L. Surrey of Wellesley College's Stone Center notes that for women, it is "as important to understand as to be understood, to empower as to be empowered."

In Holocaust literature we have many examples of these natural female capacities for relationships shining forth.

Alicia: My Story by Alicia Appleman-Jurman is the dramatic, inspiring account of a young girl who survives the Holocaust in the woods of Poland. The entire book is permeated with a feeling for Alicia's relationships to people — be they family or strangers — and her commitment to acting morally. Alicia quickly moves beyond concentrating exclusively on her own survival and that of her immediate family to helping others as well. Hers is obviously a life based on a foundation of relatedness, a life nourished by others and always nourishing others, and a model of unusual effectiveness at a young age.

Often women survived with a mother, a sister or sisters, and they feel that they survived because of those relationships. Valerie Jakober Furth's recently published *Cabbages and Geraniums* is a memoir accompanied by a striking collection of paintings and sculptures. The art and textual imagery create a haunting resonance. In the book, Jakober Furth writes:

> Twelve of our relatives had been put in the same barracks . . . .Not only was I with my family, but most of them were my peers . . . .I am convinced I would not have survived without this intimate group. We gave each other emotional and moral support. We made important decisions as a group . . . .Out of our group of fourteen, twelve of us managed to survive.

For those they loved, women have been able to draw on reserves of courage to attempt and sometimes accomplish the impossible. In *Return to Auschwitz,* Kitty Hart's mother, when about to be separated from Kitty, approached the commandant "and politely said in her best German: '*Herr Lagerfuhrer,* I would be most grateful if you could get my daughter out of *Kanada*. She has worked there for eight months. I am due to go on transport, and would like her to join me.'" Her request was granted. To remember one instance of such bravery is, in effect, to pay tribute to all those who dared boldness.

In the last decade, there has been an astonishing surge of memoirs written by women about the Holocaust. What actually enables a person to go through the process of writing a memoir? And why have these women waited 40 years?

The books noted here cover a wide range of experiences: escaping to England without one's parents who later perish; surviving in the woods; surviving a work camp; surviving a death camp; enduring in hiding. The decision to write a book

Yom Ha-Shoah

Holocaust Remembrance Program

Sunday, April 22 at 7:30 pm

Forty-five years have passed since the Holocaust. The wounds are not as fresh, although they will never heal completely. Where do we go from here? We can never forget the past, but we must also ready ourselves for the future. Two speakers will lead a search for a post-Holocaust agenda for Jews and Christians.

Anne Roiphe, author of *Lovingkindness* and *A Season for Healing* and **Michael Berenbaum**, professor of theology at Georgetown University and author of *The Vision of the Void.*

Rabbi Paul Joseph, associate director of Humanities for Jewish Education at the 92nd Street Y, will conduct a service of remembrance at the beginning of the program.

Tickets: $10

All proceeds will be used to support Jewish educational programming at the Y.

Tickets available at the Y Box office or

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The 92nd Street YM-YWHA, 1395 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10128

An agency of UJA-Federation.

catapults one back to a grotesque time and space and necessarily disrupts an equilibrium established in the intervening decades. Women writing Holocaust memoirs in the 80's are those who were able to leave the past behind to some degree in order to live their lives, but who now, for some strong internal reason, feel forced (or able) to return to that shattering epoch. Clearly, there is a deeply felt need to reconnect either with the childhood parents who were destroyed and/or the childhood world which was destroyed.

Nechama Tec talks about how she came to write her memoir, *Dry Tears: The Story of a Lost Childhood,* which is about the survival of her family in hiding in Poland.

> At the end of the war I resumed my former identity, determined to put the past behind me. I wanted to forget . . . I succeeded in part, and in part only. Thirty years later my memories began to stir. They called for attention . . . .The need to face and deal with my past became gradually stronger. It was as if I had no choice in the matter. I hardly understood this need, or its power. I only knew that I had to let myself be guided by its compelling force.

Appleman-Jurman says in the epilogue to her book, *Alicia: My Story:*

> There were months . . . when my mind was completely in the past, and I couldn't even relate to my own children. At times I felt on the brink of insanity when I wrote about my parents, brothers, all of my family and was forced to lose them and mourn all over again . . . .When I finally finished writing I felt as though I had come out of intensive care after a painful and very dangerous operation. I realized that my family will always continue to live inside me and through me . . . .

Strikingly, in these memoirs, mothers are generally described as strong and nurturing. (Fathers are much less frequently mentioned. Of course, at the camps, sexes were separated.) It would seem that these writers developed, as children and young adults, a solid sense of self which helped them survive, continue living, even write a memoir. Perhaps those with less positive maternal relationships had a more difficult time surviving. Perhaps, too, if there is no person a survivor wishes to memorialize, she may be less likely to write a memoir.

We do not read much about ambivalence, understandably. In the face of the Holocaust, it is possibly unbearable to remember and describe the range of ambivalence that existed in one's early, pre-Holocaust relationships. Or possibly it seems simply irrelevant. Or a luxury. Maybe one can write about ambivalence only if the parent(s) survived. Maybe not even then.

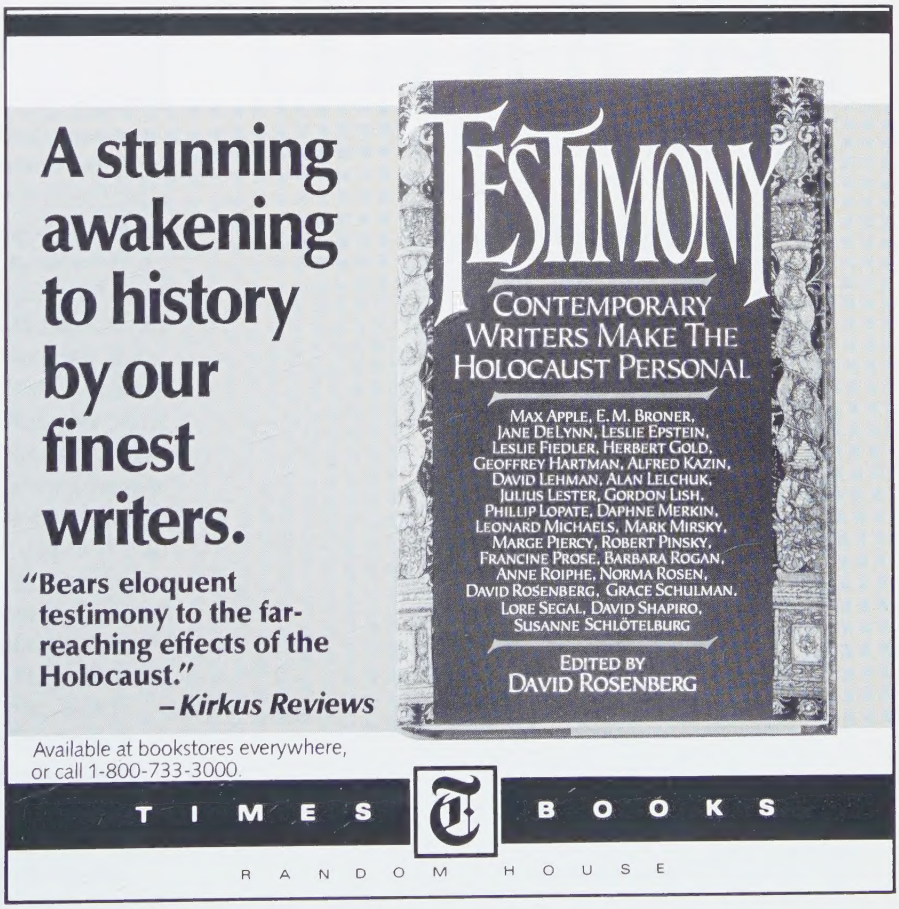
As an exception to this rule, Jakober Furth describes the transmutation of her originally somewhat difficult relationship with her mother. They survived together and honed their mutual ambivalence into something different:

> Because of our experience in Auschwitz, our relationship did change. Quite simply, mother became my closest friend. Later, we felt as if we were members of a secret society. The terrifying initiation rites had tested the nature of our attachment, had stripped away the surface and the layer below, and what we saw finally was love. Referring to the times before our internment, mother said to me, 'I gave you the least, but I got from you the most.' In the end, I too got from her the most, the love I had always craved.

On the most personal level, many of these books were written by daughters as tributes to their mothers to whom they felt they owed their life and survival. The daughters describe their mothers as the ones who gave them strength to carry on, either literally if they were present, or figuratively if they were not. Kitty Hart and her mother survived Auschwitz together. Her dedication is to the point:

> In memory of
> my mother,
> without whose love and devotion
> I would have perished long ago

Continued on page 29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TIMES BOOKS
RANDOM HOUSE

In Deena Metzger's new novel *What Dinah Thought*, here excerpted, the biblical story of Dinah is retold. In the original, Dinah's brothers murder her groom on the wedding night because he is not Jewish. In *What Dinah Thought*, the story is told from the point of view of the homonymic Dina Z., an American Jewish filmmaker who goes to Israel to make a documentary about the people who live on ancient holy ground, to discover how religious history affects them. In falling in love with a Palestinian activist, she reawakens her biblical ancestress. The original Dinah cries out, after centuries of silence, against her fate, against crimes committed in the name of faith, even as her modern sister re-enacts her story.

Dinah, daughter of Jacob by Leah, was ravished by Shechem, a Hivite. For that reason, and with the help of a peculiarly low cunning, Simon and Levi, Dina's own brothers, revenged the insult.

WHAT DINAH THOUGHT

of the whole matter is not recorded.

D. James Dee

Illustrations by Janet Shafner

I parked the car. I was somewhat wary of leaving the camera equipment exposed when all the shops were closed. Sybil had said there was relatively little theft in Israel, but I didn't like to count on the presence of soldiers. I especially didn't want to empower them with my hopes. When my father maintained that Jews didn't steal or commit crimes, I listed the Jews in the Mafia and recited them to him, endlessly, like a litany: Meyer Lansky, Louis Lepke Buchwalter, Moe Dalitz, Lewis Rosenstiel, Mickey Cohen, Allen Dorfman, Sam Blum, Bugsy Siegel, Arnold Rothstein. . . .

I was standing still, trying to get my bearings, when a tall man appeared wearing a blue and white striped *djellaba*, his head covered by a checkered cloth under a twisted rope. He could have been you; you could be anyone. I felt myself drawn to him, would have followed had he crooked a finger. I was willing to believe on the basis of my own longing that he, if he had noticed me, felt the same pull. Then he disappeared and the streets were deserted again except for the young soldiers on patrol.

> And Hamor said unto Jacob, "The soul of my son Shechem longeth for your daughter: I pray you give her to him to wife. And make ye marriages with us, and give your daughters unto us and take our daughters unto you. And ye shall dwell with us: and the land shall be before

—Ernest Sutherland Bates, ed.,
The Bible, Designed to Be Read as Living Literature

you; dwell and trade ye therein and get you possessions therein."

And Hamor and Shechem, his son, came unto the gate of their own city and communed with the men of their city, saying, "These Israelites are peaceable with us; therefore let them dwell in the land and trade therein; for the land, behold, it is large enough for them; let us take their daughters to us for wives and let us give them our daughters."

What does it do to the mind when history converges, when what one has associated with the lost and irreversible past appears most naturally upon the pavement, shopping bag in hand? The longer I stayed, the less certain I would be of what was extinct, what had survived, what would return.

Suddenly the breeze was carrying the smell of all those who had died since sundown and who, by law, religious and secular, could not be buried. Suddenly it seemed that under the scent of rosemary and thyme, under the spices readied in the synagogues to be inhaled at sunset, under the clove and myrrh, under the frankincense, as under the skirts of a bride, there hovered that other scent, lethal and animal, gamy as the flesh of the skinned and spitted deer, the demanding, even seductive odor of death.

Sometimes, Shechem, when one is in a certain frame of mind, when the window within has been thrown open and the lace curtains torn from the cornices, it is possible to see what has been rendered invisible through the years. I'd never thought that *dybbuks* could be so subtle, that their presence might be only an odor. Now it seemed to me that I was walking in air as divers walk through water, through the luminous gliding bodies of all the soldiers of the Yom Kippur War, of the Six Day War, of the War of Independence, of the wars and skirmishes of the Turks, Romans, Babylonians, Israelites.

Dinah was advancing; I was certain of it. She knew about corpses. When you died, she prepared your body though that task was usually reserved to women past menopause. But she was a widow, just having been a bride. She had lived her entire lifetime in twenty-four hours. It had aged her.

Shechem and his father went home thereafter, satisfied with the result achieved, and when they had gone, the sons of Jacob asked him to seek counsel and pretext in order to kill all the inhabitants of the city, who had deserved this punishment on account of their wickedness. Then Simeon said to them: "I have good counsel to give you. Bid them be circumcised. If they consent not, we shall take our

Reprinted with permission from *What Dinah Thought* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1989).

...what Deena thinks...

On the well-known poster which appears in *The New Our Bodies, Our Selves* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985), Deena Metzger stands on a beach naked, proudly displaying a tattooed tree where one breast used to be. A cancer survivor, she's revealing the healed wounds of her private battle.

In *What Dinah Thought*, Metzger's tenth book, she enters a more conventionally political war zone. In both book and life, what Metzger attempts is healing: whether that be the image of her own body, or the transformation of a story from one of violence to one of love.

In recasting the rape of the biblical Dinah by Shechem as a love story, Metzger explains that she "protests the seed of aggression and violence in the world, trying to bring back a female understanding."

"It's not embarrassing, belittling or narrow to think that love makes a difference, that love can make peace. If we say that our sexuality and our love are irrelevant, then we despise life, fertility, connection, intimacy, creativity. In one sweep, we throw out everything that matters, everything that keeps us alive."

Women, Metzger feels, make peace in ways vastly different from men.

— Linda Elovitz Marshall

To order the poster of Deena Metzger, send $11.50 to: Tree, PO Box 186, Topanga, CA 90290.

daughter from them, and go away. And if they consent to do this, then, when they are in pain, we shall attack them and slay them."

I sat on the stone floor so that I might be as cold as Shechem and waited until the city was totally silent, until all the men were dead and the women extracted from their rooms, until the goats and sheep clustered soundlessly in the corners of the walls, herding against the smell of blood. Then I slashed the belt from about his hips and opened his robes to examine his body. I had never washed a corpse, nor seen it done. I was only fourteen. I cut the hem from my wedding dress, wet it and ran it over his skin. It was not different from washing Reuben's child. When he was an infant and lay in my arms, I had cooled him with wet linen, singing a little song so that the two of us fell asleep in the reverie of the warm afternoon, bees and water. I washed Shechem's throat, removed the snakes of congealed blood from his shoulder. I laid him out carefully, then sat astride him, staring at his closed eyes. Lifting his stiffening hands, I passed them across my breasts. Then I slid down onto his thighs, took his phallus in my surprisingly steady hand, saw where he had cut the skin with a dagger: It had been my bride price. I picked at the red scabrous line beneath the glans, then licked it clean where he had been sore, as I had watched animals lick their genitals. Then dropped it hopelessly.

That was the time for someone to shout, "Never again." But instead that was the moment when a story was born. And a story wants to be repeated; that is its nature.

And Dinah refused to bury you although she knew the slanders that were coming.

D. James Dee

"As she was simply a girl, they assumed she had been herded back with the other women."

How can it be, Shechem, that you don't know anything about my life, that I have to tell you everything? When I was in Chile in 1973, I was viewing an exhibit of photographs in the National Museum. There were only two of us in the room; I did not know the man. The museum was exceptionally cold, we both wore gloves. The photographs were mounted with thumb tacks and Scotch tape. The Chilean stood behind me as I turned to see a life-size photograph of an American soldier standing over the body of a Vietnamese child. The child lay in the dirt where it had fallen, its hand was severed from its wrist. I reached back to the stranger to steady myself. He whispered to me so very quietly, "How do you account for the behavior of your brother?"

I hear Dinah grieving as I write this, Shechem. She says, "The story repeats itself."

The antechamber where Dinah slept with Shechem became their tomb. She wanted to wrap him in living linen, the strips of one warm body upon the other cold body. When she washed his body, she washed her own body, and then she folded herself upon him as if she were a cloth.

When her brothers entered for the second time, they were looking for booty and did not expect to encounter Dinah. They had forgotten about her altogether. As she was simply a girl, they assumed she had been herded back with the other women or that Levi had killed her as was customary under the circumstances. Or that Reuben, who was sentimental, had spared her

and taken her back to the tents though she was gravely dishonored. But when they entered, they found her in Shechem's embrace, his yellowing hand upon her shoulder. Her head was upon his scarred chest, the wounds in his neck unhealed. Her right leg was thrown across his thigh and her hair covering her face was like a shovelful of earth.

She rose slowly from the dead man and retreated to a dark corner, pressing her body against the stone. Their breath offended her. Her body closed against them, but her eyes were open, they were pits of grief extending to the other world. Her brothers felt they would die if they looked into her eyes. The flesh had fallen from her body but the bones were shining so that in her darkness there was a light. And Shechem was shining too. The two of them were the light in the room. Then she became a great bird of prey, so when they tried to remove the body, she came toward them with great webs of darkness hanging from her arms. She was the fire falling from a burning tree. She was a blight. She was a spray of ashes.

She stood over them, and she cursed them. She cursed them as the vulture curses, as the burning tree curses, as the slaughtered lion curses, as poisoned water curses. She gathered to herself all the curses of the felled, poisoned and slaughtered, all those which had already occurred and those which were coming and she heaped the curses upon her brothers and her brothers' generations. Until that moment, she had not had such power, but Shechem had taken her into his life and then into his death. In the time since he had died, she had become an old woman, and her breasts were withered grapes. These brothers who had never seen her naked, saw only bones.

"I will bury him," she said. They did not challenge her. But she didn't bury him. She placed him in the hollow trunk of a dead tree and she burned him. When she went to Egypt she took his bones and ashes and left the curses behind. When she first appeared to them she was like a tree burning in the night until there is as much light as there is darkness. Then she was a hag, was only smoke.

For days the air was filled with smoke and the ashes fell on everything even as Jacob and his sons and their wives and the newly acquired sheep, oxen and cattle, and the eighty-five captive virgins, prepared to leave. After the first days of the fire, Jacob came to her, asking that she sacrifice a lamb on the altar to appease God for him.

"If you offer a sacrifice of peace offerings unto the Lord you shall offer it at your own will." She turned to him with her dark face smeared with charcoal, her eyes a black fire in the fire, a darkness within the darkness and she laughed as only Lilith might have laughed when she confronted Adam. It was laughter that could set fires. It was the light in her.

Voices from the Holocaust

On August 6, 1942, educator and children's rights pioneer Janusz Korczak gathered the 200 orphans under his care in the Warsaw Ghetto and led them with quiet dignity to the train that would take them to Treblinka where he perished with them. "The life of an extraordinary man. . .told with a moving simplicity that takes your breath away."
—Elie Wiesel

THE KING OF CHILDREN
A Biography of Janusz Korczak by Betty Jean Lifton

15,000 children passed through the Terezin Concentration Camp on their way to the gas chambers at Auschwitz. These poems and drawings are their legacy to us.

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A FROST IN THE NIGHT
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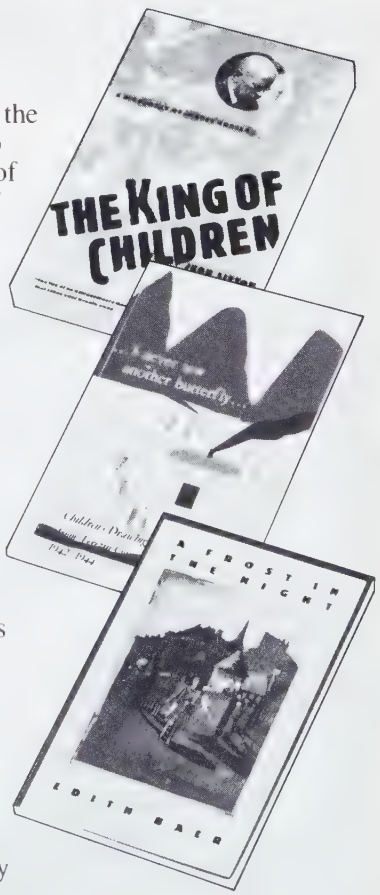

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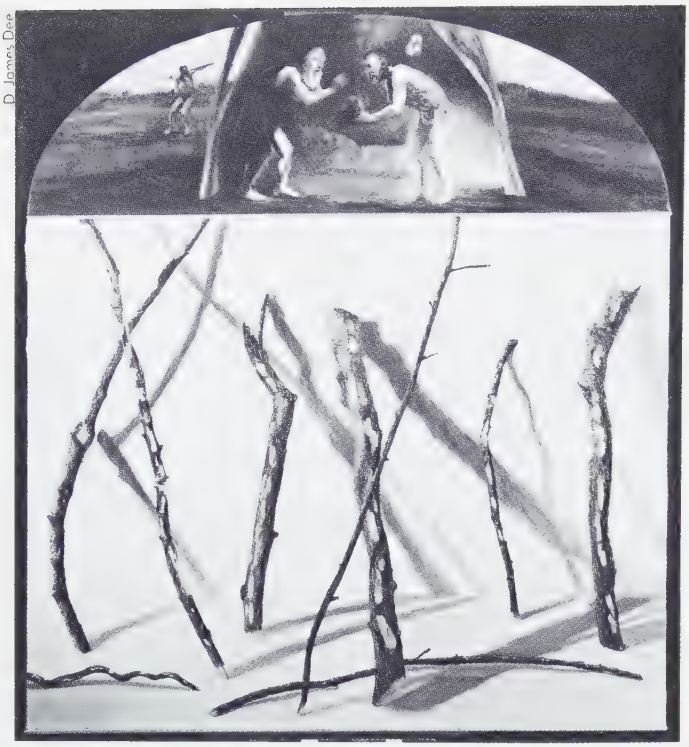


D. James Dee

"...for the land shall be desolate."

"I am your father."

She was feeding sticks to the fire and when she turned to him again her face was a scorched branch. "I don't kill living things except to eat."

"It's for God."

"Is God still hungry? Let him kill whatever he wishes to eat. I am not his handmaiden."

"And didn't your Shechem's gods demand sacrifices?" Jacob sneered. "Did Shechem refuse to make offerings to his gods? Is that why he died?"

"We don't speak about this. But I dance for his gods. Do you want to watch me dance?" She made him watch as she danced a twisted dance, leering and awkward. As she bent down, she took charcoal from the fire and rubbed it on her body, on her face, feet, hands, even sucked the charcoal stick so her lips, mouth and tongue were blackened. Then she tore her clothes and inserted the stick beneath the rags and darkened herself there. And everything turned black before Jacob's eyes. When she tore off her dress altogether, Jacob saw that her still-white breasts were covered with bloody streaks. He turned away, vomiting, and then he left her. Even from a distance, he could hear her deranged singing.

The ashes fell for days and later when the tents were opened, ashes were found in the creases and folds. The cheeses were darkened and the milk was gray. The wool of the animals was smudged so that everything woven had a dark pallor, and the water, even the wine, had ash in it. And no matter how far away they traveled, and they traveled far, they could not get clean and for a year they lived with Shechem in their mouths.

When they opened the camps of Sabra and Shattilah after the Falangists had entered, the Palestinians were spread upon the dirt like Hivites in the last days of Shechem. Like all the bodies of my beloved.

> I will bring evil from the north and a great destruction. The lion is come up from his thicket; the destroyer of the Gentiles is on his way; He is gone forth from his place to make thy land desolate; And thy cities shall be laid waste, without an inhabitant. . . . Therefore behold . . . the valley of slaughter: And the carcasses of this people shall be meat for the fowls of the heaven and for the beasts of the earth. Then will I cause to cease from the cities of Judah, the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride: for the land shall be desolate.

Jacob's God was stronger than your gods, Shechem. And the little *teraphim* that Rachel stole and hid between her legs from her father, Laban, who wouldn't dare be soiled by menstrual juices, they didn't save Dinah. And afterwards God blessed Jacob.

> And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "Ye have troubled me to make me to stink about among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house."
>
> And they said, "Should he deal with our sister as with a harlot?"
>
> And God said unto Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there; and make there an altar unto God."
>
> And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padan-aram and blessed him. And God said unto him, "Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name."

I was fourteen at the time we left Shechem, came out of Padan-aram on the way to Ephrath where we settled. On the way, our daughter, Asenath, was born, but the place and time was not recorded. When we were at Bethlehem, Benjamin was born and Rachel died.

Two years after that, Joseph was sold into slavery and I followed him. I was always with him. When he went to tend the sheep, I was behind him, and when they put him in the pit, I kept a vigil near him, and when they sold him, I followed him, and when he was in Egypt, so was I, and when he told the dreams, I told them with him. When he was in prison, I was the pile of rags outside the prison, and when he was a Viceroy, I was a priestess. However they speak of Joseph in Egypt, they do not mention me; after Shechem, they do not speak of me. And when Joseph died, I died. And when his sons, who were my sons, brought his bones back to Shechem, they brought back my bones as well.

Joseph forgave his brothers before he died. I did not. ▭

"We subscribe to the *Utne Reader*, use natural deodorant with aloe and coriander and generally don't eat flanken, but we also respect our roots."

ANXIETY 101: LEADING THE PASSOVER SEDER

by Jeff Axelbank

The Passover seder is a stressful time for the members of my family. Everybody, on some level, is dealing with intense anxiety and strain.

The first generation, the generation of my grandparents, has to pull itself together and look healthy and alert, even though they're coping with sciatica and heart palpitations. The second generation worries about whether the family's Passover traditions will survive, while they focus their attention on their grandchildren's brilliance — Michele's big vocabulary, Wendy's latest musical triumph and Howie's phenomenal memory for sports trivia and the details of President Eisenhower's death.

My mother, of this second generation, has the special status and burden of being hostess. She spends weeks filling the freezer for the seder meal, and though she loves it, she also struggles as a widow with the reality of doing this alone.

The third generation, my peers, is on its own seesaw. We are committed to raising our children in a way consonant with our values (we subscribe to the *Utne Reader*, use Tom's of Maine Natural deodorant with aloe and coriander, and we generally don't eat flanken), but we also respect our roots, and care about the sensibilities of our parents' generation.

The fourth generation, the children, perplexedly asks: Why do we have to wear these "nice" clothes and "nice" shoes? Why can't we crawl under the table instead of sitting *at* it?

In talking with friends, it's become clear to me that my family isn't the only one to feel seder stress. As my peers take the train, plane or car home to Mom and Dad, or invite relations to their own homes, they experience a mixture of pleasant anticipation and dread. Like the seder scene in Woody Allen's *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, the Passover occasion is both a simmering crucible for unending family dynamics and a structured event. After all, we have a job to do: enact the seder.

In my family (twenty adults, five children — see the genogram, next page), we are each governed by the roles we expect to fill, the roles others expect of us, and the roles placed on us by modern American society. Psychologists call the pressure to respond to so many conflicting, diverse, insistent expectations "role strain." In most families, the seder has a leader (the person with the most "role strain") whose job it is to try to satisfy all the people all the time. In my family, that leader is, for the fourth time, me.

According to tradition, my family's first seder is always held at Aunt Esther and Uncle Sid's house. Uncle Sid is the leader. He uses the *Haggadah* that the family has used for over 35 years (the one put out by Maxwell House. My favorite part of this *Hagaddah* is the centerfold — advertisements for food products from the 1950's). The second seder takes place at my mother's apartment. My father led this seder until his death five years ago. Dad also used Maxwell House.

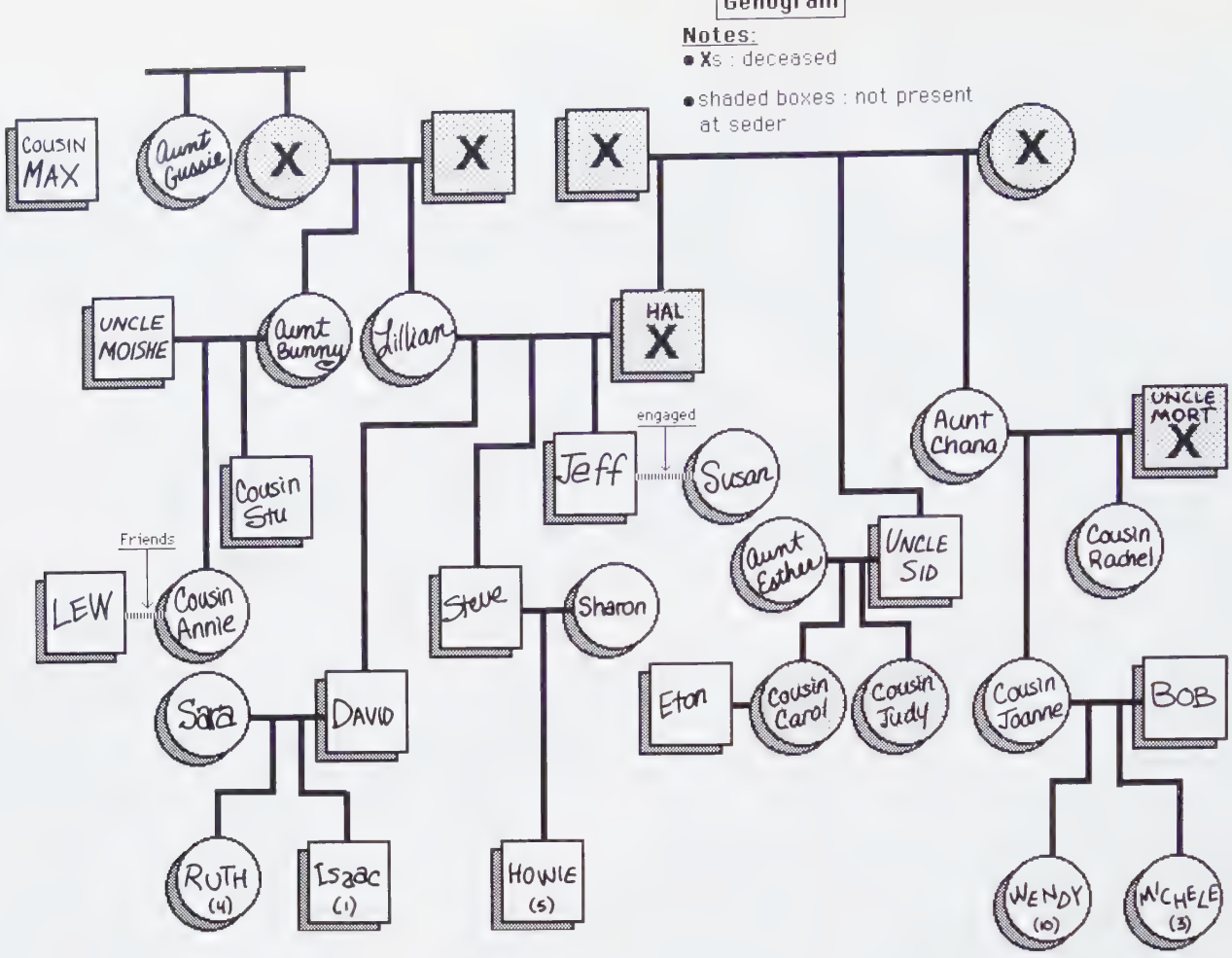
After my father's death, the question arose of who would run that seder, with the logical nominees being one of his three children. My oldest brother, David, immediately removed himself from consideration, informing us that he had no interest in the task. The middle brother, Steve, said, rather passionlessly, "I'll do it if no one else will."

I had felt for a long time that the Maxwell House *Haggadah* had to be put out to pasture (or, more appropriately, sacrificed like the Pascal lamb). I wanted a family service that would be contemporary, egalitarian and socially relevant — including, for example, readings about Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and nuclear holocaust. I felt that unless my generation put new energy into the seder, it would die. So, I agreed to run the service.

I sometimes wonder how the seder scepter might have passed if I had a sister. Would my mother have wanted to break with family tradition and "give the women a chance?" Would my sister want to carry the torch? Would there be adherence to the accustomed sex roles, with my hypothetical sister making matzah balls while the men lead the service? While I can only speculate, I'm sure that this extra variable would certainly have been one more source of role strain.

The three seders following my father's death were so stressful for me that I asked my brother Steve to lead the fourth year's seder. He reverted to the traditional Maxwell House service, though he made sure he got to ask his perennial seder joke: Why does the lion eat horseradish on Passover? Because he wants *moror* (bitter herbs).

This year, I've decided to brave it again. I've compiled a xeroxed *Haggadah* — part traditional, part innovative — and I am



committed to getting through it without collapsing from role strain. To this end, I thought it would be useful for me to list formally the sources of strain — that is, who expects what (from me and from the service and from each other), in the hopes, of course, that this exercise will help me take it all in better stride.

Psychologists use the term "role senders" for all those people (both absent and present) whose expectations color one's behavior. For example, for me, even my father, deceased for five years, is a role sender. I can still hear him singing *The Ballad of The Four Sons* to the tune of *Clementine*. It would be hard for me to skip this tune at our seder.

The following is my partial list of role senders. "Direct" roles are my understanding of what the sender has explicitly stated to me; "history" roles are based on my past experience with the sender; and "assumed" roles spring primarily from me.

MYSELF (Leader)

Direct: Everyone should love this seder. The children should be involved so that they will remember it as a special and fun occasion. We should look at our own oppression and ways we oppress others, politically, emotionally, economically, and should discuss ways to free ourselves and others. Sexist or ethnocentric language of the *Haggadah* should be modified to include both genders and all peoples.

LILLIAN (Mother)

Direct: This is her seder, and it should be carried out in the memory of her husband. Use a certain amount of Hebrew. Sing songs that Hal liked. Arrange the seating according to her ideas of who gets along with whom, and who she wants helping in the kitchen. Only traditional sweet, kosher wines should be used.

History: Things should move along at a "good pace" so that food can be served when it is ready. Cousin Max and Uncle Sid should be given "high visibility" parts in the service to show respect for their place as family elders.

Assumed: There should be a Jewish emphasis in the service (as opposed to generalizing it to *any* oppression). Don't use unusual methods (group role-plays, debates, experiential exercises, etc.).

SID (Uncle, Family Elder)

Direct: The service must be faithful to the literal meaning of the original *Haggadah*. Other peoples' oppression shouldn't be mentioned.

Assumed: Sid should be given a prominent part in the service. He expects to be consulted on questions of protocol and the propriety of any changes.

RACHEL (Cousin, Family Radical)

Direct: No sexist language should be included. There should be a variety of wines available.

History: The seder should have relevance to current political struggles for freedom from oppression. There should be lots of leeway for side conversations and laughing at the seder.

Assumed: A non-traditional service is desirable. Debates on social issues should be encouraged by the leader.

SUSAN (Fiancée)

Direct: The leader should be relaxed.

Assumed: Nothing should rattle the leader. The leader should pay lots of attention to his fiancée.

STEVE (Brother, Parent of Howie)

Direct: The service should be short. Content of the service is not that important.

History: There should be group singing

with funny changes in the songs.

Assumed: Any baseball metaphors that can be used in the service would be appreciated.

HAL (Deceased, Father)

History: The seder is a serious matter and all levity should be stopped immediately. The family traditions are the most important part of the seder, and they should be maintained.

Assumed: Lillian knows best how the seder should run. Nothing in the seder should upset her. The seder should be run the same way it always has been in our family.

WENDY (Cousin, Ten-Year-Old)

Direct: The most important part of the seder is when presents are exchanged for the *afikoman*. She doesn't like to sit next to certain people.

History: Wendy should say "The Four Questions" and get lots of attention for it.

Assumed: A certain amount of silliness is desirable in the service.

As can be seen from this list, some of the expectations here are directly opposed to each other, while others are more or less complementary. Taken as a set, what's most obvious to me is that I can't possibly please everyone. I certainly can't please myself — as I have strong values and beliefs about how a seder should be run, but these are different from Lillian's, Sid's, Hal's or Steve's.

There are even contradictions in expectations from one person. Lillian, for example, wants certain songs and many Hebrew sections, but she also expects the seder to move along at a "good pace" so as not to ruin the chicken, flanken and kugel. Rachel, on the one hand, wants a meaningful seder. On the other, she's happy to laugh her way through the service, barely paying attention. Sid and Rachel's interests are diametrically opposed: Sid wants a traditional service; Rachel a non-traditional one.

What are my coping strategies, this fifth time around, to make this year's trek from Egypt less harrowing?

First, I'll put some roles on "hold" for the duration of the seder. For example, my role as Susan's fiancé will have to wait until after the service, and my affinity for role plays will have to wait for another lifetime.

Second, in planning the seder, I'll sit by myself in a corner of a quiet room and tell intruders that I need to be alone. Hopefully, this will prevent others from getting their "two cents in" about how to lead the service.

Third, I'll set priorities. Since the seder is my mother's project, I'll give her expectations more weight. I will try to let go entirely of the roles sent by my father. Even though his expectations still carry a lot of emotional charge for me, the fact is — he's not here.

Most importantly, I'm deciding now — before the start of the service — that I am going to "go with the flow." I won't let the conflicting demands of others make me anxious.

Finally, if none of these measures is successful, I can always take heart in the last words of the seder: *L'shana habaah b'Yerushalaim*. Next year in Jerusalem. ▭

Jeff Axelbank is a doctoral student in clinical psychology at Rutgers University.

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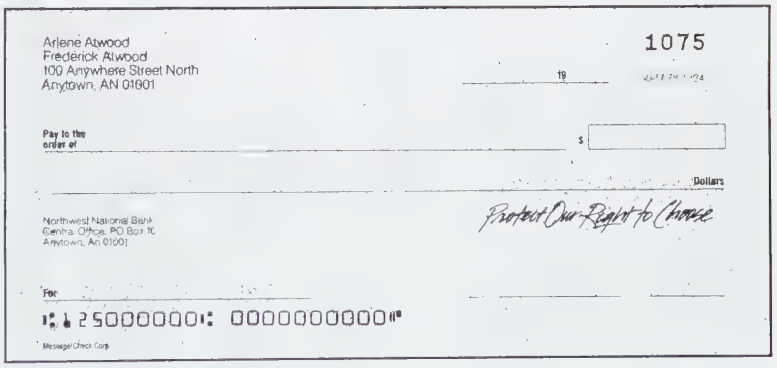

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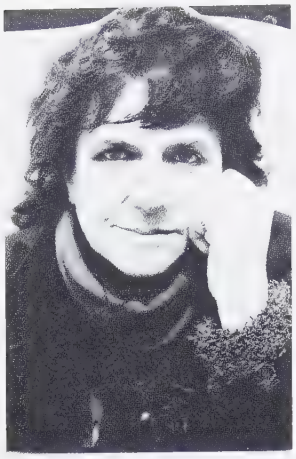

Courtesy The Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature

NEAR QUIET PLACES:

TWELVE DAYS IN POLAND

BY YEHUDIT HENDEL

David Frishberg

TEL AVIV – My trip to Poland began by accident. I didn't plan to go to Poland, had no idea of going to Poland, never thought I should go to Poland. It began by accident and it seems strange to me even now that it all started with a casual suggestion over the phone that I go to Poland and do a series of radio programs about my trip. As usual, I tried to get out of it on some pretext. I was scared and my first impulse was to refuse. Why? I thought. How? What? But suddenly it all began to move and soon I couldn't think about anything except going to Poland. Suddenly I felt I had to go to Poland and yet, at the same time, I felt a tremendous hesitation about going to Poland. All the baggage we drag around with us from Poland and anyway I don't know a word of Polish.

The whole thing began in the summer and dragged on until the fall. Perhaps on purpose. Perhaps Poland in the winter, the cold, the wind, the rain. I began to read about Poland. (I talked about Poland with everyone I met, like some dybbuk.) Here too, bizarre things happened to me.

Some people said: "Are you crazy, going to Poland, what do you want with Poland, what do we want with Poland, what's there to look for in Poland, I wouldn't go to Poland for anything in the world." All this with tremendous excitement, fury; they turned pale, they turned red. But on the other hand, some people told me with unimaginable longing: "I'd go with my eyes closed if I could, I'd fly on eagle's wings, just to see my house, my street where my parents were." And the stories. And some said nothing and pressed their lips tight. The silent ones. Choking inside. Now I understand them, those silent ones, choking inside.

You mustn't open any doors, any windows, anything that leads somewhere, everything is closed and locked up tight, forty years and their families and children still don't know anything, those who can't talk, who live like I who remember, I the witness, live like the last of all, alone like a corpse. You mustn't move a single stone in that wall of *alone like a corpse*. You mustn't touch, you mustn't hurt.

As a child, my mother grew up in a small town, Kaluszyn, an hour's train ride from Warsaw. When I was a child, she used to tell me about Kaluszyn. But I didn't know a street, I didn't know an address. I didn't know anyone. And my mother died in Israel, in Afula, in the Jezreel Valley, of typhus when I was young, many years ago.

I began to look for threads. I made telephone calls. In one of them, on a Saturday night, a man I didn't know, whose name I had just heard for the first time – and from the telephone number I knew he lived in Jaffa – told me in a low-pitched, husky voice: "Why do you have to go to Kaluszyn, there isn't even a cemetery there, the cemetery's a potato field." I didn't know what to say. There was a silence. I felt his voice break. I felt, on the other end of the line, that man who didn't know me and I didn't know him – I felt him sobbing. In a different voice, a hollow, empty voice, a voice I still keep hearing, he repeated the line that comes back to me again and again: Where the cemetery was there's a potato field. He didn't say cemetery, he said graveyard, *baisoylem*, in Yiddish. *Der baisoylem iz oykh nishtu. Der baisoylem iz a feld vos vaksen dort kartofel.*

When I arranged to meet someone in a cafe to get an address, five people came and brought addresses and they also brought packages of coffee and instant coffee and stockings and leotards and chocolate and lemons and I went there with a suitcase full of food and a notebook full of telephone numbers and with some of them I forgot who and what went with whom, people I knew and people I didn't know, from Kfar Ata and Beit Alfa and Deganya and Jerusalem; my relatives and the woman where I buy stockings and two women where I buy buttons and thread – right after the War, the woman I buy stockings from tells me – and she's never mentioned Poland before but – all of a sudden, rubbing her red eyes – in '46, after the War, when she was a little girl and they came back from Siberia to Warsaw, the whole family was walking down the street, in a row, in Warsaw. A Polish woman passed by and looked at the family walking down the street and said: "Where did such a race manage to hide?"

She told this with such excitement, as if it were happening this very minute, really – forty years – with such excitement that I wrote it down on a piece of paper in Polish: *Gdzie jeszcze taka rasa* – race! – *sie uchowala*? I don't know Polish but that combination of words struck me, *taka rasa*, such a race.

And suddenly I was plunged into a vortex of dread and regret and memory and longing to forget and hatred and streets and house numbers and will you get to Lodz, will you be in Czestochowa and maybe you'll go to the cemetery in Lublin maybe you'll find my father, maybe you'll go to the cemetery in Krakow maybe you'll find my mother. Heavy sacks we all drag on our back and big stories and small stories, a thousand rocks pour down all at once from that volcano extinguished long ago that died and wasn't buried. Why do you have to go to Kaluszyn, the stranger from Jaffa repeated. Ten thousand Jews there were in Kaluszyn, one remained. Right after the War, he went back to Kaluszyn and started running along the railroad tracks, he went crazy running along the railroad tracks and a Pole passing by shot him and he was the last corpse of Kaluszyn after the War, on the railroad tracks.

It was raining the day I left Tel Aviv. We arrived in Warsaw at six o'clock in the evening. The airport was empty. The terminal was empty. A strong, cold wind was blowing. At eight o'clock at night, from my hotel room, in the central square of Warsaw, opposite the memorial to the unknown soldier and the splendid opera house, I looked at the square and the streets which were empty at eight o'clock at night. The city was barely lighted, a weak, pale light. The street lamps were dim, not all of them lit, perhaps every third one, a very pale beam of light, and I stood for a long time and looked at the empty streets and I had

the feeling that I had come to a ghost town. I thought about the bustle right now in the streets of Tel Aviv, the people, the sounds – and this silence, this emptiness. A city of one million six hundred thousand, the largest city of Poland.

The next morning, we passed a tall building on Tlomacka Street on the site of the splendid great synagogue of Warsaw – it was blown up and completely destroyed like all of Warsaw. Warsaw was a mound of ruins, destroyed house by house, street by street and when the Russians entered Warsaw in January 1945, they found a destroyed city – the central synagogue of Warsaw was blown up along with its worshippers.

Twenty years ago, a multi-story office building was constructed here and got bogged down in the process, nothing worked right, there were constant problems, the pipes didn't work and the electricity didn't work and the elevators didn't work and the gutters and the plaster were faulty and there were fires and blockages and floods and they say there's a curse on the building, that's one of the superstitions going around Warsaw, that no building can stand here, no building, only a synagogue. The earth refuses to accept another building, only a synagogue. A huge building. Unfinished. Standing in the heart of the city. Empty still.

Our taxi driver that morning said that, now that the Israeli consulate was opened, the Jews would buy that cursed building and open an immigration office there. "Immigration office?" I asked. "How many Jews are there?"

He twisted his lips and said: "Oh, maybe two million."

"What?"

"Of course," answered the driver. "Everywhere, in the government, the ministries, everywhere, Jews, Jews, Zhids."

One day we went to the salt mines in Wieliczka near Krakow, the great salt mines of Poland and some of largest in Europe where they produce six hundred tons of salt a day. It's a huge labyrinth dug out for hundreds of years and there are many Polish legends connected with it, colorful legends about why and how they began to dig here and how they found it. About Queen Kinge, a Hungarian princess, for whom they began to dig here and how the salt caves of Hungary were brought here by magic as her wedding gift to a Polish prince. A story about a ring and how it rolled. And there are so many tunnels and so many caves that just to pass through all of them takes three months of walking for eight hours a day.

In fact we did walk in the salt tunnels supported by heavy studded, wooden beams with lanterns lighting our way along the winding tunnels, tunnel under tunnel and everything is salt. Salt over your head, salt under your feet, salt all around your body, black salt because it isn't clean, it's mixed with stone, chalk, sand, clay and only underneath is there a clean layer of white salt. Railway cars covered with salt.

We walked on steps of salt, firm, polished, carved so sharply they looked like marble. We went down into caves on salt stairs, the original stairs, stairs that are three hundred years old. Salt miners used to walk on them with bags of salt on their backs – today of course they use elevators. And there were statues of salt, treasures of Polish folklore, enormous halls of salt, a ballroom and a ceremonial hall and a church of salt, a giant prayer hall with candles and chandeliers and crosses, and prayers carved on the walls in salt.

Here, 170 meters underground, we were in a gigantic cave, called the Cave of the Jews, the Zhids. Here boys from Auschwitz were sent to work, only Jews of course. They were brought down here, 170 meters underground, 170 meters into the salt – in chains and they worked here in the salt water, in dreadful conditions, from early morning to late at night, seven hundred Jews brought down here, in eternal darkness. Sometimes they would hide here, in the salt mines, in the darkness and when the Germans found out, they went looking for them with dogs and of course found them and all of them were killed.

In the last shift, seventy men were working here, in 1944, when the Russians came. Two of them remained alive, saved by the dark and they came to visit here. One came from Venezuela and one from Detroit, his legs amputated. They went down to the salt tunnel. There is a Jewish Star carved of salt here, in the wall of salt, that giant wall of salt, deep in the earth; a crooked Jewish Star, strange, carved high in a wall of salt, as if on a ladder. What a terrifying notion – to carve a Jewish Star in a wall of salt, under the eyes of the Germans. A kind of broken window opening onto another wall of salt and another wall of salt and another wall of salt in the depths of the earth. That giant cave all of salt, the Cave of the Zhids.

That night at the hotel, a group of Israelis who went to the caves was having dinner. We were joined by a woman who hadn't been on the tour, an elderly woman, attractive and vibrant, with sparkling blue eyes, rosy cheeks and a good sense of humor. She sat across from me and I innocently told her about the salt. She listened. Listened very attentively. And I sensed something suspicious in her listening. She leaned forward a bit and looked at me all the time and listened attentively and suddenly she said, "My husband worked there, in the salt mines."

I shudder even now, as I write this. "When?" I asked.

"I don't know," she said.

"How long?"

"I don't know," she said.

"How was he saved?"

"I don't know," she said. "I don't know anything," she said. "Forty years we were married, he never said a word, not to me, not to my daughter, impossible to ask, impossible to mention. Only once, by chance, in these forty years, did he say, apropos of something else: 'I worked there, in the salt mines of Wieliczka' and he said they sent them down in ropes and they searched with dogs and found them." More than that she didn't know. Just that dry bit of information.

In my childhood Poland was depicted almost as a Jewish country. There was so much talk at home of Poland, so many stories, so many tales, so many aunts and uncles and cousins and this one's father and that one's mother. There were 368,000 Jews in Warsaw in 1939, thirty percent of the population. My grandfather had a sister who had a big store in Warsaw. She worked in the store, a tall, beautiful woman. The Gentile women liked her and came to buy from her. She always wore an apron and would take the money only through the apron – she'd put out her hand and take it through the apron.

Continued on page 20

When will we come to understand the Jews as they do themselves?

by Sister Rose Thering, Ph.D.

Since many of us in the Catholic Church have moved over the years to a more positive relationship with our Jewish sisters and brothers, it was particularly disturbing when the Carmelite Convent was erected in Auschwitz in the building that once housed the gas to exterminate Jews and others condemned to death during the Holocaust.

After the convent was established, a Belgian Catholic group entitled "Aid to the Church in Distress," began fundraising for these Carmelites. The advertising literature was alarming. It read in part: "The monastery is to be under the sign of love, peace and reconciliation, witnessing the victorious power of the cross of Jesus. It will be a spiritual fortress, and the proof of the conversion of apostates and those who went astray in various countries."

The suggestion of this literature was that the nuns were there to pray for the conversion of Jews! Compounding the issues was the fact that the building used by the Carmelites was *within* the camp grounds defined as "WORLD PATRIMONY" by UNESCO. Jews were not asking to appropriate the place for themselves; Jews have asked that *no one* appropriate it.

Catholic leaders reacted with distress. Representations to disband the place were respectfully made to the Carmelite order, the Bishop of Krakow and the Vatican. Nothing changed. The dispute, primarily in Western Europe, grew and strained Catholic-Jewish relations worldwide.

Sister Katherine MacDonald of the Canadian Centre for Ecumenism has written, "For Catholics, the presence of the convent ... can be seen as a sign of repentance and atonement. Jews, on the other hand, ask that we respect the passage quoted in the Torah which states that, in places of crime, we do nothing of what is normal or habitual. Neither ought one to eat a meal near a place of blood." Yes, the very presence of a cross shows how ignorant Christians still are of what the cross has meant in Jewish history.

To undo 2,000 years of anti-Semitism will take a long time. When will we come "to understand Jews as they understand themselves," as the 1975 Vatican Guidelines and Suggestions enjoined? When, as Roger Cardinal Etchegary once said, will we "be reconciled with our Jewish brothers and sisters whom we have plunged into the Holocaust by our contempt teaching?" In 1986 and 1987 at meetings held in Geneva between world Jewish representatives and Roman Catholic cardinals, the cardinals promised that the convent would be relocated a short distance away; the 23-foot-high cross would be removed. The signers of the accord agreed to establish an interfaith center by February, 1989, for study, research and prayer so that in the future, anti-Semitism, violence and hatred would hopefully be conquered.

Two year later the convent remained; so did the cross. Seemingly nothing was being done.

It was on July 14, 1989 that Rabbi Avraham Weiss, Glen Richter and five other members of the Jewish community went to protest peaceably at the Carmelite convent. Indeed, attempts were made to speak with the Sisters, but without success. It was then that some members climbed over the wall to enter the porch area, where each put on a prayer shawl, read Torah and/or prayed.

The workmen from within the monastery threw buckets of water mixed with urine and paint over the heads of the Jews who were praying. Several hours later, the workers attacked the group and dragged them away, shouting, "Heil Hitler."

Rabbi Weiss, in describing the incident, wrote: "Nuns peered through the convent windows as we were beaten. A Polish priest cried, 'Rip off their skullcaps. Drag them out.' Uniformed and plainclothed policemen watched without intervening. We were hauled away, dogs were let loose to patrol the area."

Although outrage at these anti-Semitic acts was expressed by many people, here and abroad, the cardinal of Krakow, Cardinal Macharsky, blamed the Jews and reneged on the Geneva accords. The primate of Poland, Joseph Cardinal Glemp, made remarks which to me and to my colleagues of the National Coalition of American Nuns were reminiscent of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. "... dear Jews, do not talk with us from the position of a people raised above all others; ... esteemed Jews ... your power lies in the mass media that are easily at your disposal in many countries. Let them not serve to spread anti-Polish feelings."

In reaction to Cardinal Glemp, the official newspaper of the Polish Labor Movement, *SOLIDARITY,* stated: "The expressions used by the Primate, even if contrary to their intent, threaten to deeply wound the feelings of many of those who are descendants and brothers of Holocaust victims." The National Coalition of American Nuns asked Cardinal Glemp for an apology. In the United States, cardinals, bishops, archbishops, priests, nuns and laymen and laywomen dissociated themselves from Cardinal Glemp's remarks.

Thank God that the Vatican on September 19, 1989, finally expressed strong support for the relocation of the convent, endorsing the Geneva accords of 1987. Furthermore, the Vatican offered to contribute its own financial support to help build the new interfaith center and the Carmelite convent.

Much work still remains within the Catholic community. I plead that we continue the dialogue.

Sister Rose Thering, Ph.D., is the executive director of the National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel. She has received many distinguished awards for her humanitarian work.

Continued from page 18

"Why through the apron?" I asked my father.

"Pride," he answered.

So even though I know there are no Jews left in Poland today, when I got here — all of a sudden, it was like a slap in the face. On the way to Lublin, when we stopped the car, an old peasant woman was standing there. We asked if perhaps she knew if there were Jews left. "No," she said. "Pulled 'em up," she said; "pulled 'em up, all of 'em, pulled 'em up by the roots."

Even where the Warsaw Ghetto stood, nothing is left, just the sewer covers, and those can be removed. In the *Umschlagplatz*, there is a railroad station, just as it was, with the train — and there is a gas station on the spot. Yet, there are many secret and semi-secret Jews, like modern Marranos, some say 8,000, some say 10,000, some say 5,000. And if you ask people on the street if there are any Jews, they say, "Yes, so-and-so here, he's a Jew." Poland, in fact, is one big Jewish cemetery, the land of the corpses of Jewry. A Jewish cemetery in Krakow, a Jewish cemetery in Lublin, a Jewish cemetery in Warsaw. The land of the corpses of Jewry.

In Warsaw, the old cemetery on Gesia Street, a nineteenth century cemetery. Hundreds of members of my family are buried here in this cemetery. Chava-Miriam-Dvoireh my father's grandmother with her jewels and her fancy collars and Reb Shmuel-Gedaliah my great-grandfather and Aunt Chaya-Rhode and Aunt Shurele and Aunt Roza-Hannah and Lippa and Avrumche — hundreds of Hendels are buried there....

There are tombstones with lions' feet and tombstones of hewn trees and even tombstones of natural basalt with Polish writing: *Henryk Wahl, 1836-1907*, and next to it are fresh white daisies and memorial candles. That is, someone came, there is someone who comes, here in Warsaw. And of course the splendid tombstones of Y.L. Peretz and Anski, a joint grave, and of Esther Rokhel Kaminska, in Polish: *Mother of the Jewish Stage* and in Yiddish: *Di mama fun Yiddishn Theater Esther Rukhel Kaminska* and there's a "u" mark under the "R" so you know it's *Rukhel*, in the Polish-Yiddish dialect.

And suddenly I was standing in front of a big, splendid, red granite tombstone with a statue of a man carrying a stone torch and reading a name I had heard my father say with great admiration, *Baynish Mikhalevitch, 1876-1926*, Bundist leader. My father, a Bundist in Warsaw, admired Mikhalevitch. With great emotion, he would tell us that Mikhalevitch had the biggest funeral in Warsaw, all the streets of Warsaw were filled for his funeral, hundreds wept at his funeral. And, all of a sudden, here I am standing in front of the stone, here, in Warsaw empty of Jews, after so many years. Borders and stairs and embellishments and turrets and iron walls and lattices and Jewish names and Polish names, a strange old iron tombstone of three women with *A group of young women* written on it. You can really sense the tremendous mass of forces and time, the countless faces of Warsaw Jewry. What's real and what's imaginary get all mixed up and it feels like a living thing.

Here's the monument to Janusz Korczak, a figure of a man with some children. It reads: *The symbolic grave of Janusz Korczak (Hirsh Goldschmidt), Warsaw 5633 — Treblinka 5702*. A lot of candles on the tombstone, next to the tombstone, on the cement and

After the revolution in Poland today, women still sweep the floors.

by Mary E. Hunt

Sweeping historical changes in Eastern Europe find most women still sweeping the kitchen floor. News reports from Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany and recently, Rumania, leave Western feminists heartened by people-propelled change yet scratching our heads at the many public reminders that it is still a man's world after all.

What is wrong with these pictures, we ask, hours into the news reports about men's revolutions? A pronounced absence of women is evident in the rolling seas of male faces: young male demonstrators scaling the Berlin Wall, boy soldiers fighting, the newly elected man and his recently deposed counterpart. One dictator's wife went with him to the grave, equal only in death, puppet number two in life. They never showed her body, only his, to assure the country that *they* were gone.

Part of the explanation (read: blame) rests with the androcentric religions, especially Christianity, that ground these cultures. Such religions reinforce the notion that women's place is in the bread line, not at the bargaining table; that women belong sweeping up the rubble, not brainstorming in the strategy session; that women should be on the home front, not in the cabinet. God wants it that way, and if history is your god, then history has always had it that way. Amen. Equality is not a revolutionary priority; equality does not come with democracy. Such are the lessons of the late 1980's.

And what of the Carmelite Catholic convent erected at Auschwitz? What do the nuns think? Funny, we never hear a peep from the nuns. Were the nuns sent to Auschwitz to stir up sentiments they don't share? Do the nuns think their convent site is appropriate? No number of nuns will ever make up a Vatican football team — since they must all sit on the bench....

Catholic women are used to such blatant disregard.

Feminist theologian Mary E. Hunt, Ph.D., is co-director of WATER, the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual in Silver Spring, Maryland.

on the ground and flowers, a tombstone standing alone among the tall, thin trees and then the mass grave, an exposed field and we know that people were buried here during the War; here they brought carts, the gates of the ghetto were opened and they came here and they buried people here right up to the end, to the fence.

One of the people in my group began to run around this area sobbing bitterly, buried his face in his hands and struck himself: "They buried my father here in '39 and my grandfather they buried here in '40 and my mother they threw out like trash like garbage like trash like trash like garbage." That awful sobbing, those blows to his face, a delicate, tormented face, all came back again as we wandered around the area that had once been the Warsaw Ghetto and all the while he struck his face: "Here they shot my father and then they dragged him through the gate to the cemetery and here they shot my grandfather and then they dragged him through the gate to the cemetery and my mother they threw out like trash like garbage like trash like garbage like trash like garbage." At the time, he was a boy of twelve. His younger brother, seven-years old, went with Korczak's children.

One day, a few of us Israelis stopped in a restaurant. As we left, the waitress asked, "Where are you from?"

One of the people in the group who knew Polish said, "Israel."

"How come you came?" she said.

"To visit relatives," he said.

She asked where they lived.

"In the ground," he said, "in the ground."

I was in Poland for twelve days, twelve very long days, much longer than just one more hour and one more hour and one more hour; it was another kind of time.

Someone called me from the Technion in Haifa who had gone to Poland, to Lodz, to look for his parents' house and he looked and he found the house and he went inside and said: "Here, my parents lived here." And they told him: "No *there were never ever any Jews here*."

Then he walked around in the yard and found a small isolated hut whose ceiling was destroyed and only the walls were left and, on them, on the peeling plaster, in a lovely mosaic, the ethrog and lulav, myrtle, pomegranates, red, like Titian, beautiful.

And a man with a very young, Israeli voice called and said he collected letters that had been floating around Europe during the War, wandering letters and he had a very strange collection. Just the day before, he had bought a letter from the city of Gora Zberdiowska where there had been three Jews, just three Jews; and in a telephone conversation with a grandson, it turned out that one of them had owned the land that was Auschwitz.

Strangely enough, after I came back from Poland, I received three pieces of mail from Warsaw: a letter from a couple of friends I met there and became friendly with, Jews, of course; a postcard I had sent to my children and when I took it out of the mailbox, I looked at the Warsaw postmark and the Polish stamp, Polska, and what I had written to my son and daughter, standing there, in the street — *regards from Warsaw, on a clear, cold, gray day and, by the time this postcard arrives, I'll already be home and that will be fine* — and I must say it really was fine, to be back in Tel Aviv; and a thick packet of pictures of tombstones of the Jewish cemetery on Gesia Street in Warsaw, the cemetery that is Warsaw Jewry.

I can't end this piece, I don't know how and maybe it's just impossible, there's no way, no words, we can never end it, what people here, in this warm land of Israel, put on ice. ▭

Yehudit Hendel is an Israeli-born novelist, who currently lives in Tel Aviv. She was awarded the 1989 Jerusalem Prize for Literature for her short story collection, Small Change *(Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1989). The story that appears here is an excerpt from Near Quiet Places: Twelve Days in Poland (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1987).*

Barbara Harshav of North Haven, Connecticut translates from Hebrew, French, German and Yiddish. She recently translated The Court Jesters *by Avigdor Dagan (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989) and is currently spending a year in Israel.*

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Milk

by Shirley Kaufman

You press it from the six goats
morning and evening
and renew your own. The baby
is harnassed to your back,
her dark head wobbling. Your life
and its order that isn't mine.

I've come as close to you
as I can. Over the sudsy milk
I watch your hands,
the little tough spots
at the tips of your fingers.
We tell it again:

how grandma stopped eating
and spit out her mush,
how the rich fields were burning,
how you stayed in your room
with the candles and incense
and played your guitar.

Once in our terrible anger
you struck at me wildly
and I couldn't see. Light
was a bolt from the laser
riveting my eye. Black flakes
floated between us for a long time.

The buckets are full. I lift
your daughter from her warm pouch
into your arms
as if I were lifting you
out of my empty body.
We're not who we are

to our mothers. Even now
in this sweet flesh
isn't there something starting
to withdraw? The child
is reminded of herself.
She wakes to cry.

An Israeli citizen who has lived in that country for thirteen years, Shirley Kaufman's most recent book of poetry is Claims *(Riverdale, N.Y.: Sheep Meadow Press, 1984).*

SUING DAD:

Bat Mitzvah in the Divorce Crossfire

by Marla Ruth Allison

At the age of eleven I challenged my father, who was a lawyer, in court. My legal representative was my mother, a commercial artist, who knew nothing more of cross-examination than what we had learned together watching Perry Mason on TV. All the parties involved in this suit were Jewish, and the witnesses were Reform and Orthodox rabbis. My father, who had been trained at Yale Law School, lost. My mother, the artist, won.

The litigation resulted from the fact that I refused my father's demand that I have a Bat Mitzvah. I had nothing against my faith or Bat Mitzvahs per se. What was inarticulable then has only become comprehensible with time and maturity; at the time, I only knew that I didn't want to go with my father for the additional visitations he requested in order to train me for a Bat Mitzvah. My mother remained neutral and promised to support whatever I decided. My father filed an action requesting that the court order me to undergo this preparation.

Before the judge rendered his decision denying my father's request, my father bellowed, "Marla, if you win, you will regret not having a Bat Mitzvah for the rest of your life." Twenty years later, I realize that the lawsuit was a kind of coming-of-age after all. While it did not prepare me to participate in religious services, I did have a rite of passage and learn a profound lesson.

My mother had spent many years prior to the Bat Mitzvah dispute trying to teach me the difference between facts and feelings. This was no easy task as my admittedly brilliant father had hammered facts spun with innuendo into my tiny head from early infancy. As their bitter divorce churned on, my father reminded me that my mother did not have a college education. Ergo, she was not deserving of love or respect. He, in contrast, had been Phi Beta Kappa in college and Order of the Coif at Yale Law School. That was supposed to clarify their relative worth; he was to be loved without question, and my mother was not.

In tears I would swagger home from visitations with my father, wrenched in my heart over whom to listen to, and persuaded that I must choose between my parents. Sadly I recall times when I would parrot my father's messages, causing much pain for both my mother and me. His arrows intended for her found a porous conduit in a daughter primed with loyalty and insecurity. Over and over my mother would patiently ask, "Honey, how do *you* feel?" and I would crumble sobbing in her arms. Mother would help me try to decipher father's code. She would listen to my fears and try to bolster what little courage I had to hang on to my fragile convictions. Nonetheless, the machinery of my father's logic and the weekly evidence he paraded past me of my mother's inferiority bored a hole into my brain. I felt like a tree growing split, rather than whole and blooming.

Following my parents' separation when I was eight, there were several years of nightmarish litigations fueled by my father's paranoia. Detectives dogged my mother's trail, hunting for non-existent paramours. Sheriffs bore subpoenas for my mother's friends and our bedridden grandmother. No one was safe from my father's legal bayonet.

But when even the judge was able to sift through the litigation and award my mother custody and my father liberal visitation, my father could not rest. He searched in earnest for another battle to launch. Suddenly new issues became important to my father. He argued (with the private goal of increasing my visitations with him) that he, not my mother, was the appropriate parent to foster my Jewish education. After all, he, not my mother, had had a Bar Mitzvah. He, it was true, attended temple more than my mother. He claimed he was Orthodox (which wasn't true); she, Reform. More importantly, he could afford the cost of a Hebrew tutor; she couldn't.

Julie Flather-Zeilin

Although it was difficult to articulate what I felt, my first feeling was that I didn't want a Bat Mitzvah. This seemed terribly disloyal to my father and perhaps even to God, and so, at times, I felt tortured about whether I should press my refusal. When my father would cross-examine me about this matter, I could never offer an explanation which was good enough for him.

I confessed with much guilt that I was not anxious to spend more time with him. I found services boring and private study with Mrs. Weiss a hellish way to spend an afternoon. My best friend's Bat Mitzvah had seemed totally aimed at garnering presents and had so little to do with spirituality. I didn't have any further rebuttal. I had only my feelings to go by; against my father's arguments they seemed small.

My father cross-examined me. My mother queried me about my feelings. When I echoed to my mother my father's pronouncements about the importance of being trained for Bat Mitzvah, my mother asked, "Who says this, Marla, you or your father? Marla, how do *you* feel?" And again, as usual, I would crumple into a ball and weep. I did not want a Bat Mitzvah. I really didn't.

Looking back, it seems likely that, unconsciously, I dreaded any event where my parents would be under the same roof, even if it was a house of worship. Parent-teacher nights at elementary school used to induce nausea in me. But I couldn't articulate my feelings then. I couldn't counter the power of my father's authoritativeness. All I had were feelings which gelled, slowly, agonizingly, into the word "no." No Bat Mitzvah. Just "no."

Mother's meager financial resources had been pillaged by my father's previous legal crusades. Attorneys had volunteered their time to help her in the past, but even such generosity had its limits. When I finally decided that I did not want a Bat Mitzvah, my mother had no more money to spend on lawyers. "Don't worry," she said to me. "I'll stand by you, even if I have to represent you myself."

I was grown and out of graduate school before my mother told me exactly how she won the case. She had protected me all along from as much of their legal battles as she could; even now I am not certain about many of the facts. How old was I when my parents were formally divorced? There had been some talk of my speaking privately with the judge in chambers, but I don't remember this happening in the end. Or did I block it out?

In the end, my mother won the case by artful cross-examination of my father's expert witness. She told me it went something like this:

Mother: "So you are an Orthodox rabbi, is that correct?"

Rabbi P.: "Yes, that is correct."

Mother: "Rabbi, isn't it true that in the Orthodox tradition boys — but not girls — are allowed to celebrate this rite of passage?"

Rabbi P.: "Well, uhhh . . . "

Mother: "Rabbi, please, you are under oath."

Rabbi P.: "Well, uh . . . yes, that is true . . . but . . . "

Mother: "No further questions."

My mother won my spiritual freedom by playing into the sexism inherent in the Orthodox tradition. My father, by claiming to be Orthodox, was stuck with *all* of it. The Yale Law School graduate had messed up on his facts.

If I have any regrets, they revolve around the sorrow of having had bitterly divorced parents. Shortly after my parents had parted and before this litigation, I had announced to my mother that I no longer believed in God. I said this as if there was no context for this sudden loss of faith.

My mother, probably guessing at the source of this feeling, grew moist-eyed and sat down to talk with me. The essence of what she said and the tone with which she spoke are indelibly etched in my memory.

"You know," she said softly, "I just look around me and I see such beauty, the flowers, the trees, the animals, the sun, and, well, I just believe there must be a force bigger than us, there must be a God who created this much beauty."

We cried together for reasons unspoken. Mother shared with me her feelings of faith, even in a period of marked struggle for her, and she also gave me the space to feel my feelings of faithlessness.

I heard mother's words, but remained unmoved until I was in my late 20s. Then, finally, I wept for their divorce, and wept for my confusion. I wept for all the love that was lost. Not quite frozen in the ground was a tender green shoot of belief. If I could feel healed and know love in my heart, perhaps there was a God. I began to know faith as a conscious, feeling and non-dogmatic adult.

While there is certainly nothing inherently heroic in resisting a rite of passage, it is not the facts but the feelings which draw my focus after all these years. My father's motives were selfish, not religious or parent-like. He was a troubled man. My subsequent understanding of his limitations has helped me to forgive him and let go of that past.

My mother, in resisting his march of logic, gave me a gift far more valuable than any material gifts I might have received. I came of age, and she stood beside me more profoundly than she might have in a Bat Mitzvah ceremony.

Mother taught me the same lesson, to find my own feelings, over and over until I finally learned. My "Torah portion" required such a reading-between-the-lines as would twist most children out of shape. I sincerely loved my father, but in the end I could not listen to him.

As I've moved into adulthood both in age and maturity, my mother's lesson has protected me from many falsehoods masquerading as righteousness. In the end, it was not either parent whom I was to choose, but myself. If I have ever regretted not having had a Bat Mitzvah, I know that adult women can choose the ceremony belatedly. I have attended such celebrations and they are joyous. But I do not regret that I refused the ceremony earlier. By standing firm by unarmored feelings, I learned a painful but dear lesson which informs my understanding of what it means to be a mature Jewish woman. Mother taught me to listen to my own heart.

For this I am eternally grateful.

Marla Ruth Allisan is a clinical social worker with The Jewish Family Service of Greater Springfield in Massachusetts. She teaches law and social work courses at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

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KOL ISHAH

U.S. WOMEN SUE FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS AT THE WALL

Debbi Cooper

Bonna Haberman of Woman of the Wall with group's new Torah.

The International Committee for Women at the Wall has called on women in the United States and Canada to write letters of protest to the Israeli Ministry of Religion. This request comes on the heels of the ministry's decision to bar women's prayer groups at the Western Wall in Jerusalem.

According to the ruling, which was jointly signed by Zevulun Hammer, minister of religious affairs, and Dan Meridor, minister of justice, women can pray at the Wall as long as they do so silently. They may not bring a *tallit* or a Torah. The ruling forbids "the holding of a religious ceremony, which is not in accordance with the custom of a [holy] place, and which offends the sensibilities of the worshippers towards the place."

The International Committee is also instituting a suit against the Ministry of Religion "on behalf of all Jewish women in the diaspora and in Israel," according to Rivka Haut of the committee. "Now women's worship at the Wall has been criminalized under pain of punishment," she says. "Our suit is based on the fact that Israeli law recognizes the equality of women, and also that we are not violating *halacha* (Jewish law)."

The Women of the Wall, the group of Israeli women currently attempting to pray at the Wall, is also instituting a suit similar to that of the international committee's. Since being barred from the Wall, the group is praying at the Archeological Gardens in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City near The Wall. They have retained private security officers to protect them while they pray.

The Israeli Supreme Court, which had solicited opinions on the issue of the Women of the Wall, is currently waiting for another response from the women. The Ministry of Religion had failed to respond by the court's Dec. 31 deadline, according to Haut, instead invoking the new regulation.

Meanwhile the Israeli Hotel Association is suing the Ministry of Religion over abuses in the supervision of *kashrut* certification, citing, among others, an incident involving the Women of the Wall. In November, the women were initially barred from holding a dedication ceremony for their new Torah at the Laromme Hotel because the Ministry of Religion threatened to revoke the hotel's *kashrut* certification if the event were held, according to Haut. Following protests from the American Jewish Congress and other organizations, a service was held at a later date at the Laromme.

Haut says that the American Jewish Committee has also come out on behalf of the women's right to pray as a group at the Western Wall. Individuals should send their letters of protest to Minister of Religious Affairs Zevulun Hammer, Ministry of Religious Affairs, 236 Yaffo St., P.O. Box 13059, Jerusalem, and Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek, Mayor's Office, Jerusalem. The letters, as well as contributions, may also be sent to the International Committee, c/o Gehlfuss, 125 W. Mt. Pleasant Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19119, which will forward them. Contributions are tax-exempt in the U.S.

— PG

500 WOMEN ATTEND JEWISH FEMINIST CONFERENCE

Judith Plaskow, associate professor of religious studies at Manhattan College, was the keynote speaker at a feminist Judaism conference in New York City, sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW).

Plaskow spoke about recreating Jewish history to include women's experiences which are largely omitted from key Jewish texts. In particular, she pointed to the Sinai experience which is described in the Torah. "One has to ask the question, 'Is God speaking to us as women?' and this is a painful question to ask," she stated.

Other speakers included author Francine Klagsbrun, playwright Wendy Wasserstein, Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin, Professors Martha Ackelsberg, Judith Hauptman, Paula Hyman and Ellen Umansky, LILITH co-founder Aviva Cantor, and author Blu Greenberg.

Approximately 500 people attended the all-day conference, which marked the twelfth anniversary of the Jewish Women's Resource Center, a research library sponsored by NCJW's New York Section.

— ND

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Mazal tov

RONIT DOLEV was appointed director-general of the Jewish Agency's Department of Renewal and Development whose mandate is to close the social gap in Israel. She is the first woman to serve as director-general of an operational department at the Jewish Agency.

JEHUDIT ELEK, a Hungarian filmmaker, won the ecumenical prize at the sixth annual Montreal Film Festival for "The Memories of the River," based on the last case of blood libel in Hungary.

DRORA KASS was a recipient of the Jewish Peace Fellowship's Third Abraham Joshua Heschel Peace Award in October 1989. Along with Rita Hauser (mentioned in LILITH, Winter 1990), she was among the five American Jews who met with PLO chairman Yasir Arafat in Stockholm in December 1988.

RABBI MARGARET MEYER of Temple Beth Sholom in Middletown, Ohio was welcomed this past summer by the Associacao Religiosa Israelita Synagogue in Rio de Janeiro as the first woman rabbi to speak from the *bimah* (podium) in Latin America.

DADIE PERLOV, executive director of the National Council of Jewish Women, along with her mother and three daughters received the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund "Buddy Award" given to corporate executives for "Bringing Up Daughters Differently" and celebrating families who have encouraged their daughters to make a difference in their communities.

RUTH POPKIN, a veteran Zionist leader and former president of Hadassah, was elected president of the Jewish National Fund.

BERTHE TORCZYNER became the first woman to hold national elective office in the Zionist Organization of America in December 1989, when she was chosen as associate chairman of its National Executive Committee.

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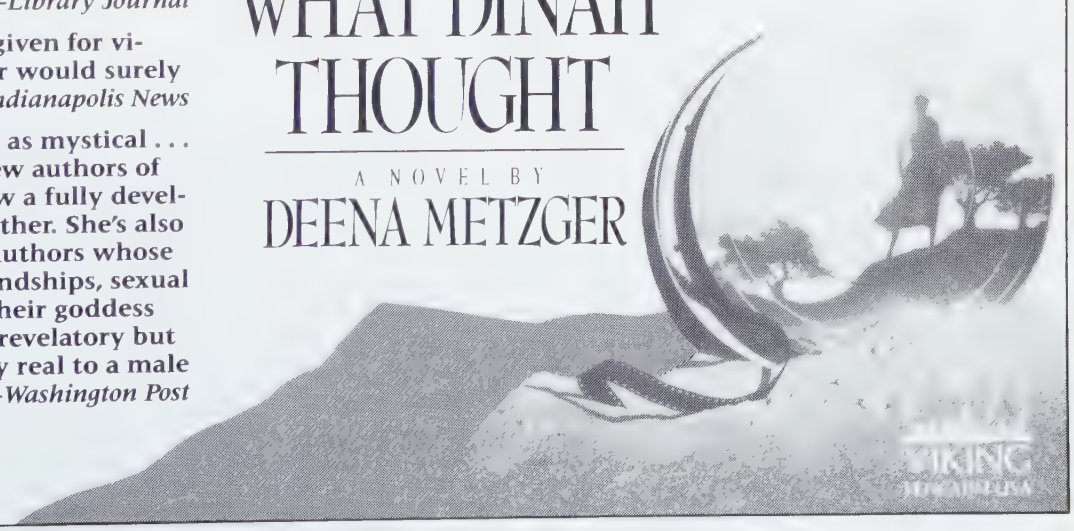

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KOL ISHAH

GAIL RUBIN MEMORIALIZED

The Jewish National Fund has established the Gail Rubin Observation Tower, Platform and Nature Trail at the Hula Nature Reserve in the Galilee region of Israel.

The project is a tribute to the late Gail Rubin, a wildlife photographer whose work has appeared in LILITH. She was killed by PLO terrorists in March 1978, in a bird sanctuary near the Mediterranean Sea in Israel.

Contributions to this project may be made c/o Jewish National Fund, 42 E. 69th St., New York, NY 10021.

WOMAN CANTOR BREAKS TRADITION IN YUGOSLAVIA

This is the story of the first woman to stand on a *bima* (synagogue podium) in Yugoslavia. Not only did this woman stand on the *bima*; she also sang. An American cantor visiting Sarajevo as a tourist, she was unexpectedly invited to participate from the *bima* in Friday evening services. I was that woman; and I made history that night in Sarajevo, in the summer of 1989.

We had timed our Friday visit to the Sephardic synagogue to coincide with Shabbat. Not knowing what degree of "frumness" (religious orthodoxy) to expect, we dressed appropriately in skirts for our tour of the synagogue Friday morning. Imagine our surprise when the synagogue secretary, whom we had visualized as a conservative, middle-aged woman in a long skirt, was a young, bubbly redhead named Rosita, dressed like a 60's hippie. She showed us the synagogue.

The sanctuary is upstairs and was formerly the women's gallery. But the entire downstairs area had been converted to a Jewish community center. In this center, we saw old men sitting around drinking Turkish coffee, smoking, playing cards – like a community center anywhere. A sign on the outside gate indicates services held regularly on Fridays and Saturdays. But services now are irregular and never held Saturday morning. Rosita seemed intrigued with the notion of my being a female cantor and told us Sarajevo has its own cantor, a twenty-year-old law student named Ranco Jajcania. She called him and asked him to lead services together with me that evening.

Ranco, a slight, wiry, wild-eyed intellectual full of stories and jokes, appeared at *shul* wearing a jeans suit, the most popular outfit of young Yugoslavians. I questioned Ranco about his training and was surprised to hear that he learned everything from tapes that the rabbi in Belgrade sent him.

At least 30 people were already at the synagogue when we arrived. Ranco handed me a *siddur* (prayerbook) and asked if I wished to do the whole service. I was hesitant, having never looked closely at a Sephardic prayerbook. So we agreed to divide it up. I mentioned that I would like a *kippah* (skullcap) and *tallit* (prayer shawl).

With the *tallit* wrapped around me, and with a certain sense of awe, I approached the beautiful *bima*, which faced the ark and not the congregation. Before turning around, I noticed that all the older men sat together on one side of the sanctuary, while younger men and women sat together on the other. I opened the service with the hymn *"Lecha Dodi."* It was strange to hear the sound of my own voice echoing in that cavernous, Turkish-inspired place. Without knowing it at the time, I sensed no woman's voice had been heard there before that night. After *"Lecha Dodi,"* Ranco chanted a few prayers in an ancient-sounding, Sephardic, sing-song chant.

I started the *"Chatzi Kaddish"* prayer, and then got tripped up midway through by unfamiliar words. I had never properly studied a Sephardic prayerbook at Hebrew Union College or elsewhere, I'm ashamed to say. Wishing to respect local traditions, I deferred and let Ranco continue. Now and then, I jumped back in. After the *"Kiddush"* (blessing over wine), a single cup of wine was passed to all the congregants.

When we were done, less than an hour later, Ranco congratulated me, and said I was the first woman to sing from a *bima* in Yugoslavia. My friend, who had attended the service, told me how frustrating it had been not to be able to signal me. Apparently only one person in that sanctuary was even holding a *siddur*; the others could not read Hebrew, and obviously I could have sung any version of the prayers I wanted to! When I expressed surprise that I had been allowed to participate as a cantor at all, the congregants said they are like Reform Jews, open to the new and to change. Yet Rosita had been sure no Yugoslavian woman would stand on the *bima* in her lifetime!

Rosita and a few notables from the community invited us to join them for their customary dinner. They took us to a new Jewish restaurant where one long table had been set for Shabbat, with *challah* and candles.

The president of the synagogue understood a historic event had taken place and asked me to write about it in their *pinkas* (archives). The original Sephardic *pinkas*, which had dated back several centuries, was lost during the war; but this *pinkas*, the Ashkenazic record, goes back at least 100 years and records visits and events of historical interest.

I wrote my few lines in the *pinkas* of this ancient Jewish community, and they wrote a few lines about me. They wrote of the unusual experience of hearing a woman cantor; they could not say more than this because my voice, my melodies, my very presence was so totally strange for them.

I left Sarajevo thinking of the ties that connect us to Jews of every time and place. The willingness to embrace strangeness rather than reject it keeps these ties strong. As long as we continue to evolve, the ties will not fray; and we may each have our chance to make history instead of merely studying it.

— Helen Leneman

OBITUARIES

NORA LEVIN, historian, and author of *The Holocaust: The Destruction of European Jewry, 1933-1945,* died in October at the age of 73. Levin was associate professor of modern Jewish history at Gratz College where she founded their Holocaust Oral History Archive.

RACHEL WISCHNITZER, renowned authority on synagogue art and architecture, died in November at the age of 104. Wischnitzer was a curator at Berlin's Jewish Museum from 1933-38 and emigrated to the U.S. in 1940, where she established the fine arts department at Yeshiva University's Stern College for Women.

Continued from page 7

Aranka Siegal's mother did not survive. Five members of Siegal's family arrived at Auschwitz together. At the initial selection, her mother went with her two youngest siblings to their deaths; Aranka and a sister were spared.

> The one with the baton extended his arm like a fencer's and let it fall between Mother and the two little ones, pushing them away from her. Mother stood petrified while seconds passed. Then, leaving us, she rushed to pick up Joli and took Sandor by the hand. "They need me more," she told the hostile and annoyed SS man with the stick. Turning to us, her eyes murky, she said, "Be brave and look after each other." It was her last act as our mother, setting an example to last us a lifetime. — *Grace in the Wilderness*

Siegal wrote two books, *Upon the Head of the Goat* and *Grace in the Wilderness*. They render so fully the caring and resourceful character of her mother that they are, in effect, an epitaph without gravestone or grave.

The process of writing serves as a partial resolution of loss and grief. When Vera Gissing was eleven, she and her older sister were sent on a children's transport to England from Prague. Her parents stayed in Czechoslovakia and perished. *Pearls of Childhood* is the story of a child's permanent separation from her parents. It is simply told and cumulatively powerful. At the end of the book there is a shift, and Gissing speaks directly to her parents:

> The shrine for my parents still lies deep in my heart, where my love for them burns, undiminished by time . . . .I discovered that my home was deep inside me, a precious and private refuge. Home is love, and you, my dearest ones, are still home to me . . . . ▭

Ellen Fishman is a freelance writer living in Boston.

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OTHER PEOPLE'S HOUSES by Lore Segal, New York: Fawcett Crest, 1986.

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UPON THE HEAD OF THE GOAT: A CHILDHOOD IN HUNGARY 1939-1944 by Aranka Siegal, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1981.

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WOMEN OF THERESIENSTADT: VOICES FROM A CONCENTRATION CAMP by Ruth Schwertferger, New York: Berg, 1989.

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TSENA

RENA

"Go and See" or "Seek Enlightenment" is the title of the Yiddish-language Torah for women, with the portion of the week and folk tales. Tsena-Rena was the first resource that enabled women to educate themselves.

REQUIRED READING

NATIONAL JEWISH SANCTUARY NEWSLETTER, published quarterly as a project of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, provides news, advocacy advice and educational resources on giving aid and shelter to illegal refugees from Latin America, along with relevant US policies. $5 for 4 issues. *San Francisco Jewish Sanctuary Coalition/PO Box 411391/San Francisco, CA 94141-1391.*

A special issue (#31) of *Connexions: An International Women's Quarterly* on **REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS: THE GLOBAL FIGHT** includes reports translated and reprinted from around the world, including Israel. $5 from *Connexions/4228 Telegraph Ave./Oakland, CA 94609.*

Healing Their Wounds: Psychotherapy with Holocaust Survivors and Their Families, edited by Paul Marcus and Alan Rosenberg, is a comprehensive anthology on the various therapeutic approaches to helping **VICTIMS OF THE HOLOCAUST.** Authors include Esther Perel, Eva Fogelman, Joan T. Freyberg, Judith Kestenberg and Arlene Steinberg. $41.95 from *Greenwood Press Inc./Box 5007, 88 Post Road West/Westport, CT 06881.*

Original texts for secularists in Engish, Hebrew and Yiddish, with transliterations, for occasions from counting the *omer* to hanging a *mezuza* appear in *We Rejoice in Our Heritage:* **HOME RITUALS FOR SECULAR AND HUMANISTIC JEWS** by Judith Seid. $5.90 from *Kopinvant Secular Press/910 Arbordale/Ann Arbor, MI 48103.*

THE DISABILITY BOOKSHOP CATALOG offers hard-to-find titles including books geared for persons with vision and hearing impairments and physical and mental limitations. Free from *Twin Peaks Press/PO Box 129/Vancouver, WA 98666.*

Up-to-date information with over 2,200 references to scholarships, fellowships, grants, loans, awards and internships for women is found in the **DIRECTORY OF FINANCIAL AIDS** *for Women* $42.50 from *Reference Service Press/1100 Industrial Rd., #9/San Carlos, CA 94070.*

For up to date data on Jews' **LIBERAL POLITICAL ATTITUDES** on such issues as affirmative action and abortion rights, take a look at Steven M. Cohen's new study, *The Dimensions of American Jewish Liberalism,* $5, part of the Jewish Political Studies series of pamphlets published by *The American Jewish Committee/165 E. 56th St./New York, NY 10022-2746.*

Also recently issued by the American Jewish Committee are two studies of interest: **ALTERNATIVE FAMILIES** *in the Jewish Community: Singles, Single Parents, Childless Couples, and Mixed-Marrieds,* $4, and **SINGLE AND JEWISH:** *Communal Perspectives,* $2, from *The American Jewish Committee/165 E. 56th St./New York, NY 10022-2746.*

CAMERA Media Review is a quarterly publication of the Committee for **ACCURACY IN MIDDLE EAST REPORTING** in America, an organization that also sponsors conferences and educational meetings to correct what the founders see as anti-Israel bias in the media. Membership in various categories includes a subscription. *CAMERA/PO Box 17322/Washington, DC 20041.*

To celebrate the 75th anniversary of the founding of Hadassah, **JEWISH MARITAL STATUS,** an anthology of personal and scholarly essays, has been compiled. Among the authors is LILITH Editor-in-Chief Susan Weidman Schneider. $23.95 at bookstores or from the publisher. *Jason Aronson/230 Livington St./Northvale, NJ 07647.*

LOOK AND LISTEN

Trees Cry for Rain: **A SEPHARDIC JOURNEY,** a 30-minute video, portrays the life of Rachel Amado Bortnick, among the last generation of native speakers of Ladino, and recalls Jewish life and customs in Turkey. $50 plus $3 shipping from the filmmaker, *Bonnie Burt Productions/1081 Warfield Ave./Oakland, CA 94610.*

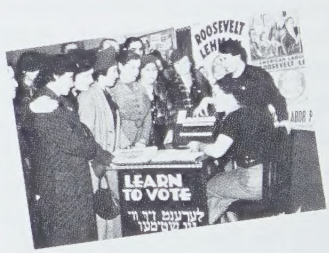
A new catalog from **WOMEN MAKE MOVIES** lists more than 175 films and videos independently produced by women, including 50 new releases. Free from *WMM/225 Lafayette St., #211/New York, NY 10012.*

FILMS OF JEWISH INTEREST newly released for home video, such as Michal Goldman's "A Jumpin' Night in the Garden of Eden" (80 minutes, $59.95), which portrays the revival of Klezmer music, are available from *Palisades Institute for Research Services, Inc./153 Waverly Pl./New York, NY 10014.*

PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS

"A Passion for Life: **STORIES AND FOLK ARTS OF PALESTINIAN AND JEWISH WOMEN** is an exhibit being created by Cindy Cohen and Feryal Abbasi Ghnaim, who are seeking women with ties to these traditional folk communities: artists, dancers, musicians and storytellers. Also volunteers for transcribing tapes and doing administrative work, as well as tax-deductible financial contributions to the project. *The Oral History Center/57 Inman St./Cambridge, MA 02139.*

An 18x24-inch color print portrait of **GOLDA MEIR** by artist Richard Stone is $25 from *Galleria Diani/Fine Art Prints Inc./PO Box 6834/Leawood, KS 66206.*



A photograph depicting the use of Yiddish in organizing women voters is one in a portfolio of postcards of **WOMEN IN SOCIAL PROTEST:** The U.S. Since 1915. Available from *Helaine Victoria Press Inc./411 E. 4th St./Bloomington, IN 47401.*

JEWISH LESBIAN DAUGHTERS OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS meets semi-annually for an intensive weekend of discussion, networking and support. To be put on the mailing list, send a contribution of $1 to $20 (according to ability) to *JLDHS/PO Box 6194/Boston, MA 02114.*

March is National Women's History Month, and the **WOMEN'S HISTORY RESOURCE CATALOG** is filled with books, films and posters covering the gamut of women's experience in the U.S., including the life stories of outstanding women. Also available, for a minimum donation of $15, is a hand-addressed **MOTHER'S DAY CARD** with a women's history motif. Send to: *National Women's History Project/7738 Bell Rd./Windsor, CA 95492.*

Soft toys, puzzles, pop-up books, tapes and games to enhance the **JEWISH CHILD'S TOY AND LIBRARY COLLECTION** are now available. Send for free catalog to: *Hands of Beth-Ann/104 W. Hortter St./Philadelphia, PA 19119.*

CALLS FOR MATERIALS

Winning entries in an **ART CONTEST** on the theme "Woman to Woman . . . Making a Difference," will appear in the eleventh annual Na'amat USA calendar for the year 5751-5752, 1990-91. The entrance fee of $20 will be applied to membership in Na'amat, The Women's Zionist Labor Organization of America; members of Na'amat and persons under age 18 enter free. Deadline May 1. Send to *Philadelphia Council Na'amat, USA/1211 Chestnut St., #510/Philadelphia, PA 19107.*

Holocaust survivors, liberators and rescuers willing to provide **INTERVIEW TESTIMONY** contact: *Linda Gordon Kuzmack/United States Holocaust Memorial Museum/2000 L St., NW, #717/Washington,DC 20036.*

Book manuscripts and proposals for edited collections are sought for a new series announced by Garland Publishing to promote the study of the **EFFECT OF GENDER ON LITERARY TYPES.** Submissions should be sent to the series editor: *Dr. Carol Snyder/Box 508, University of Houston—Clear Lake/2700 Bay Area Blvd./Houston, TX 77058.*

For an anthology of **WOMEN'S HUMOR** for Crossing Press, please send prose, poetry, essays, art, cartoons, photography, letters, and sketches to *Rosalind Warren/PO Box 259/Bala Cynwyd, PA 19004.*

Writings and drawings are being sought for an anthology about experiencing, remembering and healing from **CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE OR INCEST.** Send by April 1 to *Spirit of Survival/c/o BCMHE, 735 Commonwealth Ave./Boston, MA 02215.*

TZEDAKAH PROJECTS

Members of "Lavi," **KIEV'S UNOFFICIAL HEBREW TEACHING CLUB** would appreciate receiving current Hebrew teaching materials, as well as recent postcards and books on life in Israel. Send materials with women's content! A list of teachers, along with instructions on sending books by mail, is available from *Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry/210 West 91st St./New York, NY 10024.*

Janet Marchese of White Plains is looking for Jewish parents to adopt **JEWISH BABIES WITH DOWN'S SYNDROME.** For information call her at *914-428-1236.*

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S9BLL

"...who has made me a woman..."

by Elyse Goldstein

My earliest recollection of having strong feelings about menstruation was that horrible movie put out by Tampax. The physiological changes were mentioned, along with a handy demonstration of how to use a sanitary-napkin and belt (remember those things?). I thought it was all rather gross.

Nearly a year later, I got my period. I came home and told my mother, not knowing what to expect. Upon hearing the news, my mother explained that when she got her period, her mother slapped her hard and said, "Welcome to the pain of being a woman." But she wouldn't do that to me, oh no, she was a modern woman. She kissed me, and then gave me a little slap (a "love potch," she called it) just for tradition's sake.

Through the years, I have had my ups and downs with my monthly cycle. I have had cramps or no cramps, felt blue, felt erotic; I have felt impatient and wished it would be over (like the time I got my period suddenly on my honeymoon). But I have never felt nothing.

Menstruation has always been a sign for me: of my body working or "not working," of a miraculous inner system, of being female. I go to the *mikvah* (ritual bath) each month, *not* as an Orthodox Jew, *not* so I may be "kosher" to resume relations with my husband, but as a woman saying goodbye to a regular part of myself. I never feel dirty or the need to be cleaned at the end of my cycle; I do, however, feel a need to realign myself to the state of not menstruating. I pay attention to my cycle: its presence has been reassuring (think of all those anxious college nights . . .) and its absence was the first sign — an almost spiritual one — I received when I was trying to become pregnant and was successful.

Because I have learned to count the days and months by my own body, I have never understood why the Jewish tradition — such an essential part of my being — did not have a *bracha* (blessing) for this regular monthly event. Can it be that men were not able to imagine such a blessing and thus never composed one? Can it be we had such a blessing passed by mother to daughter which has been lost? Have women always felt ambivalent about menstruation and thus never risen up to bless it, even in private, even among only ourselves, even within the traditional concept of *tzniut* (modesty)? Should we take our society's attempt to neuter the experience with deodorized pads and feminine sprays as normative? I cannot accept this neglect, and neither can my body, which is tied inexorably with my Jewish soul.

I began searching for a *bracha* for menstruation years ago when in rabbinical school. We feminists, aggravated about the blessing men are enjoined to say each morning — *"she-lo asani ishah,"* "Blessed are You, Lord our God, who has not made me a woman." Apologists for the tradition tried to convince us that this blessing is not denigrating to women, that it only thanks God for the privilege of the burden of doing *mitzvot* (commandments) from which women are freed. But for most of us, the blessing continues to leave us as outsiders, as "other," as part of a caste system in which we are legally on the bottom, along with slaves, minors and the mentally incompetent.

Eventually, I realized that this troublesome prayer could be reappropriated and given feminist meaning. So now, each month, at the time I see I have gotten my period, I cover my head and say, *"Baruch atah Adonai, elohainu melech ha-olam, she-asani ishah."* "Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the world, who has made me a woman." (Although I have up until now used the traditional Hebrew which refers to God in the masculine, I am experimenting with various feminist revisions.)

Sometimes I say it only to myself; sometimes I say it with my husband in the room, and he answers "Amen." It is a wonderful moment. I have welcomed my body's natural order back. While I was trying to get pregnant, it was a sad moment, a moment of recognition that this was not to be the month, a time of quiet — or even angry — acceptance. (But our tradition says blessings even at hearing of a death of a loved one; blessings are not only for joy.)

Now that I have just had my first child, I resume reciting the *bracha* with bittersweet emotion. It means I'm no longer nursing fulltime because my period has returned; it signals the end of the magical time of pregnancy and nursing in my life; it reinforces the reality of return to more ordinary rhythms.

For me, there is a poetry in blessing the Source of Life for making me one more partner in the creation of life, or of recognizing, in the case of infertility, the creative and numberless ways we must all find to be partners with the Creating One in creation. It is always a revolutionary moment, too, as I realize that the slightest change in wording (changing the negative "who has NOT made me a woman" into the positive "who has made me a woman") affirms my own sanctity, despite societal negativity.

I wish my mother had thought of this when I was twelve. In fact, I wish our tradition had thought of this centuries ago. But it didn't, so we must think it up ourselves. Maybe some will add the lighting of a candle or the drinking of wine. Maybe some will wear a special piece of jewelry or create a whole ceremony. How beautiful it will be when we can identify positively, spiritually and Jewishly with our God-given cycles of lifeblood. ▭

Elyse Goldstein is the rabbi of Temple Beth David in Canton, a suburb of Boston, Massachusetts.